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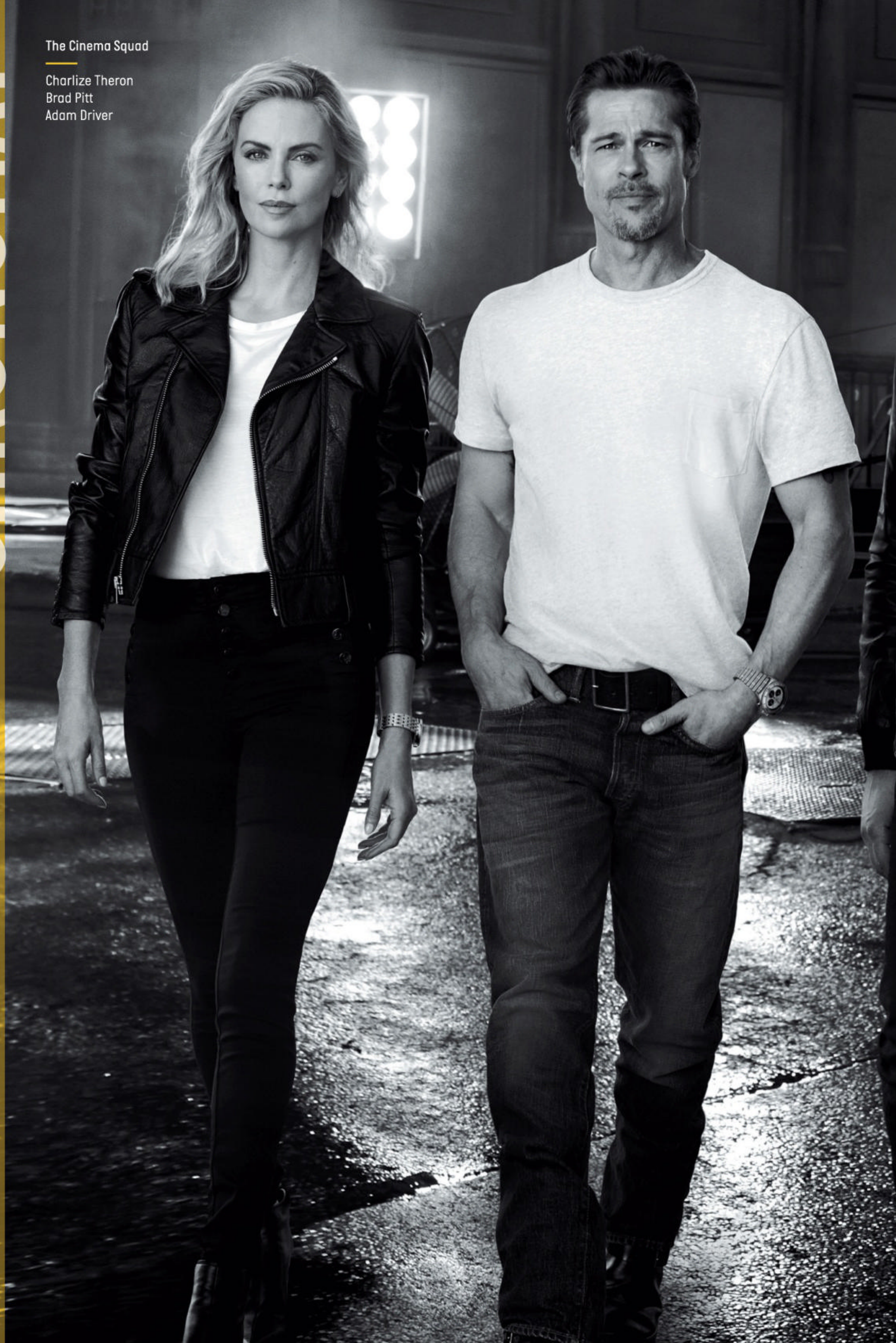

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Bulletin

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Dacian Groza

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TAG HEUER AQUARACER

Spring 2022

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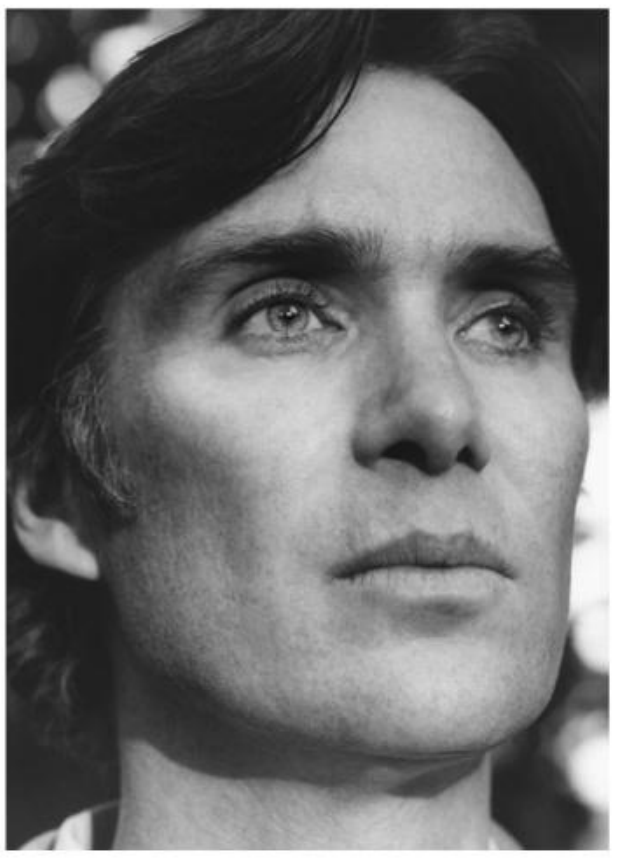

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Jesse Laitinen | Tom Craig

Hotel Splendid
Directed by Amalia Ulman
Italy, October 2021
Screening now: Ferragamo.com

Salvatore Ferragamo

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On the Cover

Cillian Murphy

Wears: black waxed mackintosh coat, £1,950; black cotton shirt, £880, both by Prada. Photograph by Tom Craig

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Access Hearst Magazines UK website at hearst.co.uk © A publication of Hearst Magazines UK. Issue: Spring 2022 | Published: 3 February 2022. ESQUIRE, ISSN 0960-5150 is published four times per year by Hearst Magazines UK. By permission of Hearst Communication Inc c/o USACAN Media Corp at 123A Distribution Way, Building H-1, Suite 104, Plattsburgh, NY 12901. Periodicals postage paid at Plattsburgh, NY. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Esquire c/o Express Mag, PO box 2769, Plattsburgh, NY 12901-0239. Magazine printed by Walstead Roche, Victoria Business Park, Roche, St Austell, PL26 8LX. Magazine distributed by Frontline Ltd, Peterborough, tel: 01733 555161. Conditions of sale and supply: ESQUIRE shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of trade except at the full retail price of £6 and shall not be lent, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover, by way of trade, or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever. Manuscripts and illustrations are accepted on the understanding that no liability is incurred for safe custody, but ESQUIRE cannot consider unsolicited material for publication. All characters in any fictional story are purely imaginary and no reference or allusion is intended to apply to any living person or persons. ESQUIRE is fully protected by copyright and nothing may be printed wholly or in part without permission. ESQUIRE is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation. We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think we have not met those standards and wish to make a complaint please contact complaints@hearst.co.uk or visit hearst.co.uk/hearst-magazines-uk-complaints-procedure. If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO at ipso.co.uk. Subscriptions and back issues: the standard subscription price (BAR) is £24 for four issues of ESQUIRE, based on the standard cover price of £6. For new and renewal orders, ring 01858 438 770* or visit hearstmagazines.co.uk/contact-us. Please note: you can also contact us regarding back issues and special editions | Already a subscriber? Visit hearstmagazines.co.uk/managemyaccount to update your contact details, renew your subscription and find out when your next issue is due to be delivered, or ring 01858 438 770*, or write to ESQUIRE, Hearst Magazines UK, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9EF. Please quote your subscription number in all correspondence | We regret that free gifts, supplements, books and other items included with the magazine when it is sold in the UK are not available with copies of the magazine purchased outside the UK | *Lines open weekdays, 8am–9.30pm; Saturdays, 8am–4pm. Calls are charged at your standard network rate. Please check with your network provider for more details.

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'IN THE MIX', PAGE 152

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'UNDER THE RADAR', PAGE 102

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'THE BEAUTY IN THE BATH', PAGE 124

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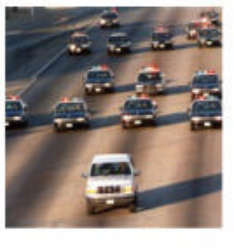
'I DO LIKE TO BE', PAGE 96



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'OJ RUINED MY HOLIDAY', PAGE 100

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'THE MAJOR DONOR', PAGE 158

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'WHAT WE WEAR NOW', PAGE 49

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'BRIGHT SPARKS', PAGE 130

CALEB AZUMAH NELSON'S

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'A TABLE FOR TWO', PAGE 99

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'BRIGHT SPARKS', PAGE 130

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'IN THE MIX', PAGE 152

HERMÈS
PARIS

lighthearted

Esquire's Spring 2022 cover, featuring actor Cillian Murphy

Getting into character

PEAKY BLINDERS, AS DEVOTEES OF THE BBC GANGSTER EPIC ALREADY KNOW, takes its name from that of a real criminal gang, the terror of Birmingham at the turn of the 20th century, with interests in robbery, racketeering, illegal bookmaking and, most notoriously, dressing to kill.

Any stroppy bunch of hoodlums can earn a reputation for violence and venality. It takes an unusual degree of originality, and a real commitment to putting on a show, to be remembered, more than a century on, for your natty wardrobe. The ability to inspire trends from beyond the early grave is typically the preserve of pop stars, not villains.

The Peaky Blinders, of whom photographs still exist — mug shots, mostly — were street-corner dandies, in the noble, and ignoble, tradition of urban and suburban working-class young British men determined to transcend their grim situations by adopting a highly codified, elaborate style of dress: clean living under difficult circumstances, as the Mods later sloganeered this impulse.

In the case of the Peaky Blinders, as in others, the style affected was an irreverent twist on formal menswear, taken to unlikely extremes. To law-abiding straights, it might seem that there is an intrinsic opposition between an adherence to fastidiousness, even flamboyance, in dress, and an equally powerful commitment to an aggressive amorality. But the dapper figures of the underworld, wiping innocent blood from polished toecaps with their silk pocket squares, seem never to have admitted this dichotomy — and neither have dandies throughout history, of whatever stripe and social class, from Regency St James's to revolutionary St Petersburg.

The story that the Peaky Blinders concealed razor blades in the peaks of their flat caps — hence the name — is almost certainly apocryphal. (Sorry to disappoint.) What is not disputed is their considerable flair for self-presentation, and that was certainly one of the initial appeals of the TV show to us at *Esquire*, when we heard about it in early 2013. Other enticements included the fact that it was the passion project of the screenwriter Steven Knight (*Dirty Pretty Things*, *Eastern Promises*), himself a debonair Brummie, and that for his lead, the fearsome gang leader Tommy Shelby, Knight had cast the wonderful Irish actor Cillian Murphy (*28 Days Later*, *Inception*, Scarecrow in the *Dark Knight* films).

We don't always get these things right, but we went big on the show that year, and it didn't disappoint. What began as a slick genre workout deepened into something more interesting and less predictable. *Peaky Blinders*, which returns soon for its sixth and final series, became wildly successful, at home and around the world. It also developed into something of a men's style phenomenon, so that you could, if the mood took you, dress from hat to heel in items named after the show's characters. (Made in Britain Shelby Tweed waistcoat, £160.) And while we won't have a word said against our cover star, Cillian Murphy's barber has a lot of dodgy footballers' haircuts to answer for, such has been the influence of Tommy Shelby's striking barnet. The makers of the clothes named for the show are →

Alex Bilmes
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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careful to point out that *Peaky Blinders* gear is intended to be worn independently of any associations with the characters. The clothes, they say, are not costumes. But is that quite right? Isn't all clothing, to an extent, costume?

Like the actors who would, generations later, play characters inspired by them (and the boys and men who would, in turn, buy clothes inspired by those actors), the real-life Peaky Blinders were, as we all are, performers playing their parts, enacting a specific type of maleness. In their case: nasty, brutish and sharp. Their caps were signifiers of belonging, part of a loose uniform, but also they were props, allowing brutalised, impoverished kids to get into character as fearless outlaws. If you can convince yourself of your masculine bonafides, maybe you can convince others, too. You don't need to be a mobster to understand this. Anyone who has ever put on a suit and tie knows the power that clothing can hold, over its wearer and everyone else. No doubt this is true of a bikini, too.

MASCULINITY, AS WE INCREASINGLY UNDERSTAND IT, IS PERFORMANCE. And menswear is costume. The wearing of even the most apparently functional, nondescript item — a white T-shirt, a faded pair of jeans — is a form of fancy dress, freighted with associations. Slip into that T-shirt, pull on those jeans: who are you now? A Springsteenian working man? A Castro clone? Marlon Brando? Are you a real man, or a person pretending to be a real man? Aren't all real men people pretending? What's a real man?

Next month, a major new exhibition opens at the V&A in London. It's called *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear*. In November, I was given a preview of some of the exhibits. These range from classical sculpture — still the strongest influence on the lines and proportions of traditional men's clothing — to today's designs. In the restoration room, where the V&A's team was working on garments including frock coats, rock-star outfits and military uniforms, I was particularly struck by a tiny, delicate pale-pink outfit by one of the most influential fashion designers of the moment, Harris Reed, whose eye-catching experiments in gender fluidity can be seen on celebrities including Harry Styles. Styles, a startlingly pretty Bowie-Bolan tribute act, is perhaps the most visible British dandy of the age. His, too, is a performative masculinity, but a very different one from Tommy Shelby's.

You can have your own sneak preview of *Fashioning Masculinities,* beginning on page 116 of this issue, and hear from the curators responsible. I came away from my conversations with them, and my encounters with the exhibits, with a head full of questions about the nature of masculinity, or masculinities, now and in the past, and the roles that clothes have played in its constructions. We have reached a potentially transformative moment in men's style. Masculinity, the performance of it and the look of it, is once again up for grabs. Once, Harry Styles's looks would have been dismissed as effeminacy. Today, such thinking is old hat. A bibbity-bobbity one.

(Sidenote, for those who think that perhaps all this verbiage doesn't apply to them: a number of men I know, most of them, like me, bourgeois London media types, have spent much of their time since the pandemic began showing up on Zoom calls dressed in high-end fleeces and expensive anoraks and — I'm guessing, because I can't see their feet — limited-edition trail-running shoes. These men greet each day as if they are shortly to embark on a polar expedition, despite the fact that the most daring trip they are likely to undertake is the school run, with maybe a coffee stop on the way home *if they're lucky*. And if that's not performative masculinity, then my name's Ernest Shackleton. These men are cosplaying traditional maleness: rugged, adventurous, practical. It's silly, sure, but no sillier than putting on a suit and tie and thinking that makes you suddenly sober, competent and businesslike. It just *appears* to make you seem that way. You hope.)

This issue also has journalism on subjects that have nothing to do with clothes, from *Esquire*'s unmatched team of writers, this time including Tabitha Lasley, Andrew O'Hagan, Georgia Pritchett and Caleb Azumah Nelson. We have Olivia Ovenden's interview with Ben Whishaw, an actor in grave danger of becoming a national treasure, thanks to his roles as Q, Paddington Bear and, now, as Adam Kay in the TV adaptation of the runaway bestseller *This is Going to Hurt*. Ed Caesar sits down with the great Carl Cox, one of the most significant figures in dance music, and British pop culture, of the past 40 years. Johnny Davis speaks to Matt Reeves, director of *The Batman*, about how he intends to reinvent the Caped Crusader with a new star, Robert Pattinson. (If you're looking for a story about a man who uses costume to construct a persona, look no further than Bruce Wayne.) And Miranda Collinge interviews Cillian Murphy as he bids farewell to *Peaky Blinders*, and takes on the biggest role of his career, the lead in *Oppenheimer*, a new biopic of the inventor of the atomic bomb, from Christopher Nolan (ask Matt Reeves about him). That's Cillian on the cover, in a field in Ireland in November, photographed by Tom Craig and styled by Charlie Teasdale and looking, if he doesn't mind my saying so, every inch the dandy.

Another bravura performance. ○

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BULLETIN

PEOPLE TO WATCH, PLACES TO BE, PRODUCTS TO BUY

What we wear now

Esquire celebrates stylish men

Photographs by Richard Dowker
Edited by Charlie Teasdale

Models and stylists are fine and dandy and we couldn't make *Esquire* without them (thank you, models and stylists). But every now and then, it's instructive to look at how real men — yes, actual real men! — are wearing clothes. We invited six stylish Brits to a photo studio in London to show off their favourite 'fits and talk about what getting dressed means to them in 2022.

Manish Puri
Insurance consultant

"Clothes bring me joy. I don't really understand people that don't like clothes at all. Sleeping, eating and getting dressed are the only three things you're going to have to do every day for the rest of your life. So, even if it is never going to be your favourite thing, you might as well find a way to take some pleasure in the process."

Jacket and trousers by The Anthology. Shirt by Bryceland's. Tie by Drake's. Loafers by Crockett & Jones. Socks by Mes Chaussettes Rouges. Watch by Sekonda Raketa

Charles Olafare
Advertising creative

"Clothes are a way to play dress up and still be considered a functioning adult. I care more about the way a nice shirt or a funny tie can make you look and feel than any specific brand or trend. To me, it's just about putting on a costume and having a laugh."

Coat by Carrier Company. Shirt by Universal Works. Trousers by Gramicci. Shoes by Birkenstock. Socks by Rototo

Dean Khalil
Artist

"I started skateboarding in 1997, aged 12, so I've been involved in a subculture where trends come and go for a long time. As the trends passed, I slowly found things that stuck. And as I got older, I refined those choices but continued to keep a toe in a subculture that is very forward-thinking, style-wise."

Shirt by Burberry. T-Shirt by H&M. Vintage necklace. Trousers by Dickies. Trainers by Converse. Watch by Mondaine

Myles Pereira
Production manager

"Around six years ago, I shifted towards buying items I would have for life, so I rarely purchase new current pieces — unless they are particularly special. I'm often on the lookout for a specific cut or style of item, meaning digging and hunting is necessary. Most of the time it doesn't exist, so it's all about looking for something similar from brands I know would have made items in the style."

Shirt by Awake. Jogging bottoms by Fruit of the Loom. Shoes by Gucci

Leon Cerrone (and Daisy)
Retail manager

"My two grandfathers were from an era where you were always dressed smart, even to walk the dog, so that had a profound effect on me. Also, being around my dad and getting taken to football and witnessing that terrace culture — seeing how much those men all cared about how immaculately they were turned out — was an eye opener too."

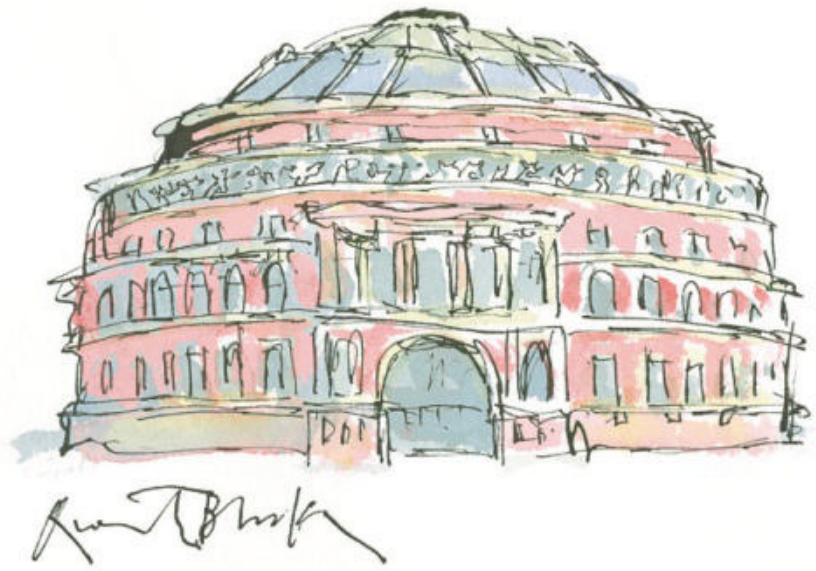
Hat by Western Hydrodynamic Research. Gilet by Garbstore. Vintage mohair cardigan. T-shirt by Online Ceramics. Trousers by Dockers. Trainers by Nike

Charlie McCormick
Gardener

"My Carhartt dungarees have lots of different pins and badges of places I have been, or just some I have been given by friends or bought from junk shops. They all have meaning to me."

Shirt by Ralph Lauren. Neckerchief by T Snook. Dungarees by Carhartt (customised with pin badges). Boots by Blundstone. Ring by Bleue Burnham

Hair: Tommy Taylor @ Stella Creative Artists | Makeup: Anna Inglis Hall @ Stella Creative Artists using Laura Mercier | Photographed at The Heath2; cre8studiolondon.com



Illustrated by Quentin Blake

The Royal Albert Hall

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The good doctor

Ben Whishaw plays a medic under pressure in the BBC's adaptation of Adam Kay's bestselling memoir, This is Going to Hurt

By Olivia Ovenden

Ben Whishaw is in the market for a new way to unwind. When the pandemic took hold in early 2020, he returned from filming in Chicago to London, where he lives with his partner Mark Bradshaw, a composer for film and TV, and, as a distraction from the news, pursued an interest in developing photos. He wasn't very good at it, but there was something appealing about the way it demanded his total attention. "I'm thinking, maybe I should go climbing?" he says tentatively on a Zoom call from Paris, where he is shooting *Passages*, the new film from American indie director, Ira Sachs. "Very good for the body. It uses all of you," says Whishaw. "In fact, I'm going to find a climbing wall and go immediately." →

'You have to keep pushing yourself, and keep exploring': famous as John Keats, Paddington Bear and Bond quartermaster, Q, Ben Whishaw has made a career of playing national treasures

Arved Colvin-Smith

'We live in times where everything is binary. And that's not how I experience life. People are messy and strange, and we don't know ourselves very well'

Climbing is ripe with metaphors for Whishaw's approach to acting, a career that he treats as a series of challenging moves, coupled with a determination not to look backwards. When we speak in December, he still hasn't seen *No Time to Die*, the third film in which he plays Q to Daniel Craig's 007.

"I hate watching myself," Whishaw says. "I'm always so disappointed. I know you just have to get over it and I'm not the only person in the world, but that's how it feels to me. I do think if you were really satisfied, if you watch something like, 'Fuck, I'm so good in that,' then that would be pretty weird."

Even at 41, there is a teenage restlessness about Whishaw, dressed in a black hoodie and hiding behind contorted arms when reaching for the right words. He has kind eyes but a serious face, though the seriousness is often dispelled by bouts of laughter. He has spent the morning working on a Russian accent and at one point stops to apologise as he can hear the Slavic intonation he's been practising invading his head. In real life, the actor, whose credentials include studying at Rada and, to great acclaim and aged just 23, playing Hamlet at The Old Vic, rarely strays far from softly spoken RP.

Whishaw is best known for his roles as national treasures, such as James Bond's bespectacled quartermaster, or voicing marmalade-sandwich connoisseur Paddington Bear in the two recent films. For his next project, he takes on the most beloved British institution of all: the NHS. He plays former doctor Adam Kay in the BBC's adaptation of his bestselling memoir *This is Going to Hurt*, a darkly comic look at the pressure on NHS workers, which had a huge impact — and dizzying sales — when published in 2017.

Such were the restrictions of filming under Covid guidelines, Whishaw only met Kay once. Given the personal nature of the story, he wonders if that was for the best. Altered slightly from Kay's book, the series finds our protagonist haunted by a potentially fatal mistake he makes while exhausted and overworked. The TV

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Clockwise from top left: Whishaw as John Keats in 'Bright Star' (2009); playing Q in 'No Time to Die' (2021); alongside Ambika Mod in the upcoming TV series 'This is Going to Hurt'; as Sebastian Flyte in 'Brideshead Revisited' (2008); Whishaw voices the nation's favourite bear in the unimprovable 'Paddington 2' (2017)

adaptation reverses the events of the book, so that the trauma that comes at the very end of the memoir instead opens the TV series, meaning it haunts him in hallucinations. What the screen version retains is the gallows humour that many doctors rely on — such as affectionately referring to obstetrics and gynaecology as "brats and twats" — in order to get through their shift.

The story takes on renewed significance after the pandemic. It made Whishaw see the staff of the NHS not as distant heroes, but ordinary people. "We go into hospitals like children and give ourselves over to [doctors] as though they're something bigger than human, and how could they be? These people are capable of making mistakes, of having bad days. The hours are completely impossible, the stress is something I can't even conceive of — and all while dealing with situations that are life and death."

Whishaw, who grew up as a non-identical twin in rural Bedfordshire, would not have made it as a medic. He was "terrible at science and maths, absolutely appalling". Instead, he is a supremely gifted actor, for whom inhabiting the tortured has become something of a calling card: his CV includes Sebastian Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited* in 2008, and a forlorn John Keats in Jane Campion's *Bright Star* the following year. It was on that film that he met Bradshaw, who wrote the score. More recently, there was disgraced Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe's troubled lover Norman Scott in *A Very English Scandal*, also on the BBC, for which he won an Emmy, and an airport security officer on the verge of a breakdown in thriller *Surge*.

"I don't actively seek out those things," he says. "I'd love to do something where... well," he pauses, head in hands. "Actually no, I wouldn't. I'm interested in the things that are difficult about life and I think it's important to be disturbed by things sometimes.

"We live in times where everything is binary, isn't it? And that's not how I experience life. People are messy and strange, and sometimes we don't know ourselves very well."

In *This is Going to Hurt*, we see more of Kay's life outside the hospital than the book offers, showing how traumas often follow doctors home. The series also shows Kay hiding the relationship with his boyfriend from his family and colleagues. "This is set in 2006, which isn't that long ago, but it was different in terms of how gay people were accepted," Whishaw says. "I remember blatant homophobia: people shouting at you, throwing shit at you and trying to start a fight with you. It was common, normal. I'm not saying that doesn't happen anymore because sadly I hear about it, but it definitely started to get a bit better."

In addition to *Passages* — about a gay relationship thrown into chaos when one man has an affair with a woman, played by the beguiling Adèle Exarchopoulos — Whishaw will next appear in *Women Talking*, about a group of abused women in an isolated religious colony in Bolivia, alongside Rooney Mara, Frances McDormand and Claire Foy. Then there's the third *Paddington* movie, undeniably the most eagerly awaited of all given its beloved predecessor at one point last year overtook *Citizen Kane* as the highest-rated movie on Rotten Tomatoes. By the time you read this, Whishaw will have started recording the accident-prone bear's voice. "They could so easily not have been good, couldn't they?" he says fondly of the franchise. "But they're touching and hilarious, and that's really hard to do."

Does Whishaw take stock of how well things are going for him? "I just go on to the next thing," he says. "You have to keep pushing yourself and keep exploring.

"As I'm getting older, I see that you're kind of formed by certain things and our brains are calcified. I don't want to get stuck. The best thing you can do is just start again and be really shit at something. I'm thinking maybe I'll learn Russian?" ○

This is Going to Hurt airs on BBC Two in February

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Good sports

Right on time for the Commonwealth Games, a new watch from Longines

By Johnny Davis

Longines has announced a watch to commemorate the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The dial and the bezel are blue and yellow, echoing the colour palette used in the Games' zigzag "B" emblem, said by the event's designers to represent "Birmingham as the youngest city in Europe". (They mean by inhabitants' age. Birmingham itself has been around since 1166. At the time of writing, almost 40 per cent of its population is under 25.)

The Hydroconquest, a reliable and reliably priced dive watch, was introduced by Longines in 2007. It has provided a modern counterpart to its vintage-style divers, the Legend Diver and the Skin Diver, ever since.

The company has form with sporting events. As well as being the official timekeeper for the French Open at Roland-Garros, it has sponsored many an Olympic Games, beginning with the 1952 Winter Olympics in Oslo. Longines also equipped polar explorer Roald Amundsen and air pioneer Charles Lindbergh. ○

HydroConquest XXII Commonwealth Games, £1,600, by Longines; longines.com

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Future Prep

Old Prep too old for you? New Prep not new enough? Welcome to a boundary breaking new twist on collegiate style

By Murray Clark

Preppy style is a Rubik's Cube. You can play with it, amend its colours and combinations, but it remains largely unchanged; a strict dress code, rose-tinted with mid-century varsity nostalgia, worn by men with Roman numerals appended to their names. But preppiness is not just for squares. The immaculate sports-casual wardrobe pioneered on American university campuses in the years following WWII — also known as "Ivy Style" — remains a menswear staple even on this side of the pond: button-down Oxfords, bold stripes, rugby shirts, penny loafers and chinos are classics, and will forever remain so. But the Holy Writ inscribed at Harvard, Yale and the rest is being challenged. Prep is breaking free from its box (or cube).

This isn't New Prep (or Prep 2.0, as it was called in some circles), the look popularised in recent years by labels including Aime Leon Doré and Noah. The emergent strain is something altogether different. We're calling it Future Prep.

The heritage is still recognisable (just about), but Future Prep is light-years away from a 1950s college quad. Future Prep either inflates or distorts the wizened markers of traditional Preppy style. Take, for example, new collections by Dior, Louis Vuitton and the ascendant Los Angeles outfit Rhude. Letterman sweaters, once associated with jocks who punch hard and flunk often, have grown bigger, and more graphic, with absurdly sized characters felted and fastened to the front of colourful jackets and billowy cardigans. At Hermès and Burberry, the ribbed collars and hems of the classic bomber jacket have been Frankensteined to varying effects. The Hermès take on Preppy looks more like Han Solo on holiday, in 2093. Burberry's college boy resembles a member of *Dune*'s House Harkonnen, transported to a techno night in Berlin. Across all of them is a smattering of boxy schoolboy shorts that wouldn't pass muster at Princeton, but might be standard issue on the Ganymede campus. In fact, Future Prep wouldn't pass with any of prep's old guard. That's the best thing about it.

Though Prep 2.0 relaxed and rejuvenated the garb of Hamptons second-homers, making a patchwork shirt and styling it with a beanie isn't exactly pushing things forward. It's still preppy. And so too is Future Prep. But in this vibrant, weird reworking of a classic, we're seeing a whole new side to prep. Now if only someone would reinvent the Rubik's Cube. ○

An Ivy League of their own: Louis Vuitton's new letterman jacket, above, mixes prep with streetwear, while collegiate sweaters and boxy shorts featured on the SS '22 runway, from below left, at Dior, Rhude and Hermès

Courtesy of Louis Vuitton | Courtesy of Hermès | Getty

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Around the grounds

A new exhibition celebrates the architecture of the beautiful game

By Nick Pope

In a disused quarry on the outskirts of Braga, Portugal, sits the most beautiful football stadium on Earth. It's also the greyest. One end of the all-concrete Estádio Municipal de Braga, home to the local team, SC Braga, is carved out of the sloping granite of the Monte Castro hillside, while the other looks down at the Cávado River valley. It has two 15,000-seater stands on each side, which splay out diagonally and fold back like books on their last pages. Built by Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura in 2003, it is a world away from the mega stadiums of modern football. But it could yet provide a blueprint for the future.

The brutalist landmark is one of many examples of the architecture within the world's most beloved sport that will be celebrated and deconstructed in *Football: Designing the Beautiful Game*, a new exhibition arriving at The Design Museum in London on 8 April. Split into five sections — "Performance", "Identity", "Crowd", "Spectacle" and "Play" — the exhibition will also cover the history of kits and crests, the evolution of formations, and even the choreographies of Italian ultras. Everything, bar the proper way to crimp a pie. It's the first comprehensive show of its kind, pondering the aesthetics of a sport that has long been seen as undeserving of such treatment.

"I think people have always had very strong feelings about football design, but they might not frame it in the language of talking about it as a design object," says curator Elly Watson, who has collaborated with The National Football Museum in Manchester for over two years on the project. In this age of hyper-commercialisation, it seemed like a good time to take stock of football's past, present and future. "I would say there is definitely a stronger appetite for talking about [football] through the lens of design at the moment," says Watson. →

Dacian Groza

Above: the Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning Estádio Municipal de Braga stadium in northern Portugal, home to Primeira Liga side SC Braga

Above, from top: the 99,354-capacity Camp Nou, home to FC Barcelona, is the largest football stadium in Europe, and the fourth largest in the world; an aerial view of the pristine football pitch on the small Swedish island of Källö Knippla; makeshift goalposts drawn on Shore Street in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Opposite: the blueprint for Forest Green Rovers' Eco Park Stadium, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, which aims be the world's first all-timber professional football ground

She points to the new strips we tear apart on social media at the beginning of each season, and the moth-eaten throwbacks we still cherish. At a time where fashion houses and indie brands alike are queuing up to work with clubs (Giorgio Armani designed this season's Napoli kit), the way that something looks, and the process behind it, has never been more important. Die-hard fans may recoil at the suggestion that their clubs are now brands, but that's what they are. And to reach its commercial potential, an elite brand needs a distinct and appealing identity.

But in both scale and influence, no aspect of football design has grown quite so wildly as stadiums. This winter, Qatar will host its first World Cup across eight grounds that have been built at a total cost of around $10 billion. These vast building projects are a prerequisite for any country that hopes to earn lucrative hosting rights from Fifa. Meanwhile, in the domestic leagues, a super stadium is the natural next step for any club with ambition. Real Madrid are currently giving its Santiago Bernabéu a £500 million makeover, complete with a pitch that collapses into an underground bunker to make way for live gigs and basketball matches. But are these stadiums improving the experience of watching football? And what makes a good stadium anyway?

"It's a funny thing," says Watson, "because in some ways, it's changing all the time. But in others, it doesn't change at all." She suggests that the ancient Greeks had everything sussed with their amphitheatres, and we've largely been overcomplicating things ever since. It's about sightlines, acoustics and crowd flow. It's about making sure that people can see each other in their periphery and feel part of something bigger than themselves. Problems arrive when architects don't respect the matchday routines of supporters, or the importance of location and infrastructure. Football stadiums are effectively civic buildings, after all, and a ground, for better or worse, is always a reflection of its time.

"You find a lot of mega stadiums that were built in the 1950s are very far out of the city centre. People were excited about cars. They thought cars were the future and everyone was going to have a car," Watson says. "They have failed, ultimately, because they don't respect ritual."

Instead, the exhibition delves into the history of iconic stadiums, past and present, that bled into the fabric of their cities, like the San Siro in Milan, Arsenal's former ground Highbury, and Rangers' Ibrox stadium in Glasgow. The latter two were both designed by legendary Scottish architect Archibald Leitch, and the show will

Philip Mytorp/Unsplash | Chitra Gulabrani | Neville Gabie | MIR Architects

display his original drawings. Elsewhere, as with the aforementioned Estádio Municipal de Braga, the exhibition marvels at the footballing structures that integrate nature. “The stadium should respect the setting within which it’s sitting and maybe amplify it,” says Watson. “[Where the] more interesting stadiums are being built is where people are properly engaging with the community that they’re meant to be serving.”

It’s a philosophy that architects have become increasingly engaged with in recent years. While many stadiums introduced in the 2000s followed a somewhat generic template — Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium, the replacement for Highbury, was modelled on Benfica’s Estádio da Luz, for example — designers are now attempting to draw design from an area’s history and culture. Of the seven mammoth super-stadiums that have been built so far for the World Cup, five are interpretations of traditional Qatari patterns and cultural artefacts. Dhow fishing boats, Bedouin tents, woven caps and ancient Arab forts are all sources of inspiration.

Such grand ambition has come at a terrible human cost, with multiple credible reports linking the construction of World Cup stadia in Qatar directly to the deaths of migrant workers. In early 2021, *The Guardian* disclosed that 37 deaths had been registered in relation to stadium-building, and the report suggested that intensely hot working conditions were a major factor.

Then there’s the criticism that these arenas often become white elephants in the immediate aftermath of a competition. One Qatari venue, Stadium 974 in Doha, is made up of shipping containers and recycled materials that will be dismantled and donated to poorer countries, but the fates of its siblings are less clear. What will happen when Fifa’s travelling circus has left town, unlikely to return?

For the 2014 World Cup, the Brazilian government stumped up over $200 million for the Arena da Amazônia, a 44,300-seater ground in the middle of the Amazon, much of which was funded by taxpayers. The stadium sits largely empty now, accruing steep running costs. Another World Cup stadium, Mané Garrincha, in Brasilia, doubles as a bus depot, while the $230 million Arena Pantanal in Cuiabá became possibly the world’s most expensive homeless shelter. The 46,154-seater Arena Pernambuco in São Lourenço da Mata has been rented out for birthday parties.

The stadiums of the future, then, should prioritise safety and sustainability. Watson points to the Tate Modern architects Herzog & de Meuron’s work on Bayern Munich’s illuminated Allianz Arena as a good example of the latter. “They accepted from the beginning that the priorities of the club are going to change,” she says, referring to the stadium’s highly adaptable build that can be altered over time. “They can accommodate that without knocking down the entire thing.” The exhibition also spotlights the revolutionary work being done by Zaha Hadid Architects on Forest Green Rovers’ Eco Park, in Gloucestershire, which will be the world’s first all-timber stadium. “It’s a carbon-neutral project, reflecting the overall identity as an environmentally responsible club,” says Watson.

The most basic principle, though, is one that’s too often ignored — one that places community over commercialism, but risks getting buried under the building blocks of the game’s future.

“It's about questioning what people want out of football.” ○

Football: Designing the Beautiful Game will run from 8 April at The Design Museum, 224-238 Kensington High Street, London W8; designmuseum.org

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Candy crush

It's going to be a big year for biscuits

By Johnny Davis

Teal tracksuits. Slip-on trainers. Boiler suits. Last year's TV biggie *Squid Game* got a lot of attention for its unlikely fashions, and the unlikely boost it gave to sales of those fashions — white Vans skate shoes up by 7,800 per cent, according to, um, Vans. But what about the biscuits? South Korean *dalgona* candy, a crackly honeycomb-like street food featured as a challenge in the show, became a "youth craze" — or "candy crush", if you will — in part because it's so easy to make at home. (The website Delish lists its ingredients as: 2 tbsp sugar; 1 pinch baking power; cooking spray.)

Joël Penkman

In fact, biscuits were already enjoying a rising success, thanks to so many of us being stuck in our kitchens for the last 18 months. The baked snack had a bumper year in 2020, hitting nearly £3bn in sales in the UK and being consumed by "99.5 per cent" of households (what's up with the other 0.5 per cent?), according to a report in *Food Manufacture* magazine.

In fact, we had been in danger of going a bit soft on the British biscuit — the world's first mass-produced food product, and one sold all over the Empire. ("Huntley & Palmers made special glucose-enriched biscuits for [Robert Falcon] Scott's expedition to the Antarctic," notes Lizzie Collingham, author of *The Biscuit: The History of a Very British Indulgence*. "They were the perfect food for explorers and surveyors out in the wild.") We're not saying these two things were connected* but before Gordon Brown lost the 2010 election he proved himself unable to name his favourite biscuit during an interview on Mumsnet.

Graze bars. Propercorn popcorn. Bounce Salted Caramel Protein Balls... Snacking has changed a lot in the past few years, and the Crawford's Pink Wafer, Hobnob and Jaffa Cake** have all had their work cut out to compete for shelf space.

Recent innovations in the sector include McVitie's "on-trend" cherry flavour "to entice younger customers", plus hybrid Jaffa Jonuts that have helped to lure The Kids back to the biscuit aisle. While at the less pocket-money-price end of the market, a rash of chic biscuit-serving London fashion cafés, including Marchesi 1824, Thomas's and Rose Bakery at Dover Street Market, all continue to go from strength to strength, without a salted protein ball in sight.

Elsewhere, the continuing and inexplicable success of the Biscuiteers, the sickeningly twee husband-and-wife start-up who will ice your company logo onto branded cookies "as a unique influencer gifting solution", so long as it's in the style of a fourth-year kid who has had too much sugar, remains testament to the biscuit's enduring appeal. "The worst has happened! Great God! This is an awful place," as Scott wrote in his diary shortly before his death in 1912, surely predicting the Biscuiteers' rise a century later.

Still, you can't have everything. ○

*They definitely were
**It's a biscuit

‘Doctors who play tennis, on mushrooms’

Can Casablanca’s Charaf Tajer hold on to the silliness?

By Charlie Teasdale

On a crisp Tuesday in November, east London’s Wapping Wall is quiet but for a few joggers and a modest queue of customers for a hole-in-the-wall delicatessen. Suddenly, in a blur of animal print and vintage workwear, a quartet of fashion people emerge from a restaurant, meticulously layered and coolly cocooned in cigarette smoke.

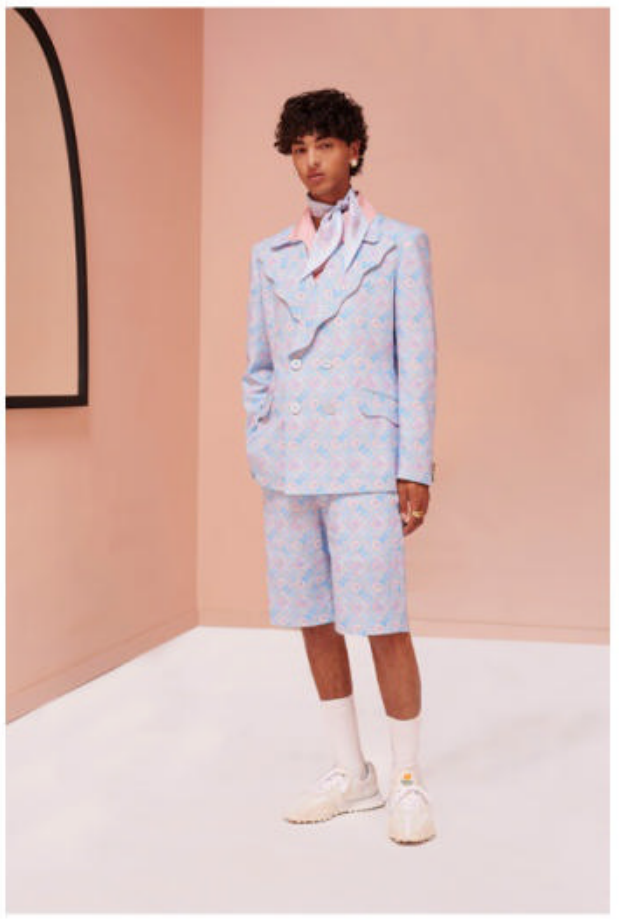
At the group’s apex stands Charaf Tajer, the founder and creative director of Casablanca, the ultra-modish luxury fashion brand that has, in four short and surpassingly strange years, gone from sitting-room startup to serious industry player.

Tall, with a boyish face aged only by a very neat, gently greying beard and oversized tinted spectacles, Tajer, at 36, is among the most influential new creatives in high-end fashion. His label’s aesthetic — a sort of sporty sexiness, slightly kitsch, very French — encompasses silk shirts, tennis whites, terry towelling, short shorts, flares, sweatpants and melodramatic tailoring. A pair of tube socks, the brand’s “entry point”, will set you back around £25, while the most expensive pieces run into the thousands, putting Casablanca on a par with Gucci or Saint Laurent.

The prints — applied to silks or denim or any fabric that will hold them — are Casablanca’s calling card. Everything from Parisian street scenes and psychedelic landscapes to geometric patterns fit for the Overlook Hotel. Casablanca’s partnership with New Balance — expressed in lurid, oversized takes on the shoemaker’s classic runners — has been perhaps the predominant high-low fashion collaboration of the past few years. The company has gone from quite silly to completely serious, and somehow managed to hold on to the silliness.

The label began, inauspiciously, in Tajer’s mother’s sitting room in 2018. The son of Moroccan-immigrant parents, he grew up between Paris and Casablanca, and when clothes eventually materialised as a form of expression for Tajer and his friends, the glamour of one city melded with the vibrancy of the other. “When I was a teenager, we started dressing mainly in Hermès, Lacoste and Cartier, with some Nike

Above: Casablanca’s SS ’22 Collection, ‘Masao San’, takes its cues from Japanese design and The Memphis Group.
Top right: Casablanca’s take on Audemars Piguet’s Royal Oak, made in collaboration with Mad Paris and Browns



Cal McIntyre/Greatest Magazine | Imaxtree

'I think this is a real art form — playing with "bad taste" or fun, but never falling into it': Charaf Tajer, above, the founder of clothing brand Casablanca

Air-Max. We said we dressed like 'doctors who play tennis,'" Tajer says. "We knew we were kids with blue-collar parents, but [fashion] was a window into a dream. More like an escapism. It was the beginning of my fashion life." His style was boldly "luxurious". Big sunglasses, silks, country-club knitwear, but resolutely Gallic, too.

We are talking in the boardroom of his new London HQ, overlooking the Thames. With 40 or so staff, the company recently outgrew its original Hackney studios; Casablanca is based in London for creative reasons, says Tajer: "Because of the London College of Fashion, people are so well trained [here] and it makes a massive difference, too. In Paris, it was so complicated."

In 2008, Tajer was part of the team that founded streetwear boutique and eventual streetwear brand Pigalle. The company thrives to this day, but a decade or so in, he realised he wasn't on the right path. "I think Pigalle was the first step to expressing ourselves in the fashion world. It wasn't 100 per cent what I wanted to do, but I thought, at the time, maybe my dreams of having a continuation of French fashion codes were a bit passé. But then I realised, no, I need to do things exactly as I want."

The first Casablanca collection, SS '19, was positively Calvinist compared to the latter-day vibe. (Now they are more like "doctors who play tennis, on mushrooms," says Tajer, chuckling.) But it was colourful and irreverent, and, in hindsight, exactly what the menswear market needed.

"It certainly came at the right time, an antidote to pure logo culture that was dominating menswear," says Dean Cook, head of menswear buying at Browns, the first UK store to buy into Casablanca's debut collection. "When streetwear and men's fashion was all about jersey, suddenly Casablanca rolled in with silks, flamboyant prints, towelling tracksuits, and there was a reason to get dressed up again." Soon after, Casablanca was available in many of the most important fashion boutiques around the world — United Arrows in Japan, Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, Ssense online etc — and it's been a steady ascent ever since.

New Casablanca "products" come thick and fast. Since 2018, in addition to the seasonal ranges, the brand has launched womenswear, fine-leather goods and a skiwear collection, and →

'Everybody here works with the idea that they are creating something that will be Casablanca vintage in 20 years': Casablanca's 'Grand Prix' AW '21 collection is inspired by the glamour and traditions of 1960s Monaco

at the end of last year, launched two limited-edition Audemars Piguet watches. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos was pictured wearing one of the brand's shirts at his New Year's Eve celebrations.

The latest offering, the SS '22 collection, is titled "Masao San" in honour of a Japanese friend of Tajer. Although there are quintessentially Japanese design flourishes, the aesthetic is rooted in the work of The Memphis Group, postmodern interior designers of the 1980s. Marshmallow shapes and undulating hemlines are realised in candy-colour pastels and stark primary colours, resulting in a collection that is at once faintly ridiculous and, somehow, cool. It is the antidote to "po-faced fashion", says Tajer.

"It's easy to ridicule colourful stuff," he explains, "but you take more risks by doing what we do. When you manage to do it right and it looks fun but serious at the same time, it's the right balance. Then you have something strong. It's a thin line. But I think this is a real art form — playing with 'bad taste' or fun, but never falling into it."

Casablanca, Tajer implores, is an exercise in glee. Glee for the act of getting dressed, glee for pop culture, glee for the majesty of the world itself. But the fashion industry is famously glee-intolerant. And a joke repeated is a joke diminished. The question for Casablanca, having crashed the staid and rigid world of luxury, is how to capitalise on it.

"My goal is to create a new classic," he says, leaning back in his chair, steely eyes visible through big Cartier shades. "I want the brand to exist in 100 years. So we do everything to give it that basis. Everybody here works with the idea that they are creating something that will be Casablanca vintage in 20 years."

Tajer dreams of a Casablanca store among the greats on Paris's Avenue Montaigne, but he is banking on the retail landscape being very different by the time it opens. "I think stores will become 100 per cent about the experience," he says. "Almost no-one will buy things from stores, they will become more like amusement parks for adults. You go in to experience the world of Casablanca, it's the perfect brand for that."

"I think the [brand's] success is dependent on his storytelling," says Forbes fashion and luxury journalist Roxanne Robinson, referring to Tajer's impressive knack for "universe building". "Some of those brands that made films [as a replacement for pandemic-struck fashion shows] were actually conveying something stronger or better than they ever could on a runway. It gave them another dimension. You saw Casablanca's 'Grand Prix' [AW '21] film and you thought, 'I want to be part of that.'"

"The sky's the limit with menswear," says Robinson. "Tajer hit the market with something immediately recognisable and surrounded by a lot of fun and enthusiasm, and he definitely knows what the ingredients are to grow this brand into something bigger. But you never know."

There were rumours last year that Tajer would be hired as the artistic director of Kenzo, but the role eventually went to Nigo, founder of the Japanese label A Bathing Ape. How accurate the rumours were — whether Tajer's own label will be able to maintain its independence from the luxury conglomerates; if his vision for the brand can be sustained over as many years as the famous legacy labels he measures his success against — remains to be seen. For now, it's enough for him to be able to say, not without justification, that "if you take Casablanca away from the landscape of fashion, there's going to be something missing." ○

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2022 vision

Google Glass was a joke, but Big Tech still believes in smart-specs

By Johnny Davis

Sometime in early 2013, a handful of Americans could be spotted out and about in California wearing a new gizmo that looked like a cross between a pair of plastic prescription glasses and Cyclops's wraparound visor from the *X-Men*. It was the prototype of a new Google launch, Project Glass. Released to the public later that year, the $1,500 smart-glasses comprised of a tiny display screen mounted onto a flexible frame that incorporated a camera, a microphone and a computer. Like a Google phone, they could be voice-activated, using an "OK Glass..." command.

Some visionaries predicted that the ability to take photographs, check your email or start recording video, without having to pull out your phone, would be a gamechanger. Others thought people would make a spectacle of themselves. The naysayers won, no contest. Banned everywhere from cinemas to changing rooms, Google Glass became such a joke that even its parent company released its own parody video. The objections were many and obvious. But chief among them was that they made you look ridiculous.

Big Tech, however, was far from done with the idea. Apple, Microsoft, Xiaomi and at least two-dozen other companies are currently said to be developing eyewear with some connectivity/AI capability, with 2022 cited as the year when smart-glasses crossover into the mainstream.

On the one hand, you might wonder why they were quite so derided in the first place. The popularity of other smart devices is flying. Worldwide sales of VR headsets, including Oculus Quest and PlayStation VR, amounted to 6.1m units in 2021. The Apple Watch, underappreciated on its 2015 launch, now outsells the entire Swiss watch industry. Forecasters predict the wearable tech market will be worth $64bn by 2024. Even Google hasn't really given up on Google Glass — a newer itineration, Glass Enterprise Edition, is marketed at serious-looking professionals requiring access to hands-free instruction on assembly plants, power stations and hospital wards.

On the other hand, has the last decade really made us so comfortable with the idea of smart wearables that we'd now be happy to wear one on our faces, in public?

Back in 2013, one Google Glass reviewer suggested the answer was to "make them look cool... like a pair of Ray-Bans". In 2021, Facebook teamed up with the sunglasses company to make that happen. The resulting product, the oddly titled "Ray-Ban Stories", was almost indistinguishable from a pair of Wayfarers, but could take calls, shoot pictures and record video. Facebook's bigger picture is no doubt related to its "metaverse", or Meta, the "next evolution of social connection" — with smart-specs one day being the way to put a whole computing universe in front of our eyes, one capable of transporting us into a virtual-reality game or overlaying navigation, while still looking like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business*.

Elsewhere, the Chinese-American brand Lenovo has announced its ThinkReality A3 glasses, which tether to PCs and Motorola devices. They allow the user to watch several virtual screens at once, while interacting with their peers or co-workers using a microphone. Like a Zoom call you can't walk away from.

Smart-glasses are also being trialled for virtual shopping and figuring out how furniture would look in our homes. Ikea has partnered with Microsoft's HoloLens so its customers can plan out a kitchen or redesign their living room, without getting the tape measure out. At £3,000 a pair and weighing 556g, HoloLens's applications seem destined to be business-only, at least for now.

None of that sounds especially sexy. If smart-glasses are going to be the next big thing, it may be down to one company to make that happen — Apple. Can it repackage existing tech into a piece of kit that proves irresistible, like it did with the iPod from MP3 players and its Apple Watch from fitness devices?

In December, in an article headlined "Apple's iPhone Successor Comes Into Focus", *The Wall Street Journal* said it expected the company's first AR device would be announced by the end of 2022. In the story, it mocked up a render of the "head-mounted device" — a pair of outsized sci-fi glasses glowing Apple white with its heart-quickening logo visible on the left side-arm. You'd at least give them a try.

Overcoming the cultural challenge of persuading people to wear a computer on their faces is a big hurdle. But then, until recently, millions of people had given up on wearing a watch, using their phone to tell the time instead. It took a phone company to persuade them they needed both.

Today, the market for VR headsets remains relatively small. But the market for eyeglasses is worth around $140bn a year. History tells us it's one Apple will have set its sights on. ○

Looking to the future (from top): the new Google Glass Enterprise edition; Microsoft's HoloLens 2 offering; a pair of Ray-Ban Stories, made in partnership with Facebook and EssilorLuxottica

Battery farming

An electric Land Rover for the cowshed and a Cowshed

By Will Hersey

When Land Rover announced in 2015 that it was replacing the venerable Defender with an ultra-modern, gadget-laden SUV more likely to be seen on its way to a Cowshed spa than outside an actual bona-fide cowshed, the outpouring of love for the soon-to-be condemned icon was bordering on the mawkish. Many observers, some still sobbing gently into the sleeves of their Barbour White Labels, felt the premium firm had missed a trick.

As it turned out, Land Rover had correctly seen very sizable dollar signs in the all-new model, launched in 2019, that has since sold in container loads. But the split nicely encapsulates the current dichotomy in car design; while the motor industry heads into a clinical and technical future, are the traditional cars that make many of us happy mostly from the past?

"If you look at modern car design, the reality is that they all look the same. They have to look the same, because of crash structures and impact resistance and all the other things," says Justin Lunny, founder of Everrati UK, one of a new wave of firms turning old classics into fully functioning electric vehicles (EVs). "But we have an opportunity with these beautiful cars that people still love."

The models that Everrati currently offers are a 964 Porsche 911, Ford GT40 and, naturally enough, a vintage Land Rover Series IIA, considered by some to be the holy grail in this global electrified vintage market, which Lunny says is "exploding".

"We're exactly in that sweet spot for millennials and Gen Z, who love the idea of a classic car but would never dream of buying one with a combustion engine."

Above: the classic Land Rover series IIA has been given the EV treatment by Everatti UK. Above right: the vehicle's adapted electric power socket and minimalist dashboard

On an old RAF airfield outside Bicester in Oxfordshire — a county which is quietly and somewhat curiously becoming Europe's electromobility heartland — the firm's small team of engineers, pulled together from McLaren, Audi, Jaguar Land Rover and Lotus, among others, has been testing for the past year, with the first cars having been delivered to customers in late 2021. These clients vary from hardened car nuts, who already own Singer and Ruf Porsches, to a twentysomething who wants to own the classic car his dad used to drive.

The Everrati Land Rover uses the IIA chassis, made between 1961-'71, and considered by many to be the definitive model. In the tiny and

impeccably clean workshop — this is electric engineering, after all — sits the almost-complete prototype, beautifully finished in a classic pastel green with khaki canvas. Apparently only two "outsiders" have previously been behind the wheel, or even sat on the burgundy leather seats.

"It doesn't matter whether it's an Aston or a Lamborghini parked next to you in a pub car park, people love the Land Rover series IIA because it's a cool thing," says Lunny, who vividly remembers being driven up a hill in one at his uncle's farm as a boy.

It's proven one of the hardest cars to engineer and package up, especially while retaining the old chassis and clearance intact, though the lessons learned will make launching similar models far easier — and quicker — in the future. The hint is strong that both a Range Rover and a Defender will follow.

Inside, the dashboard has been largely untouched, save for a few necessary updates. The old alternator is now a low battery switch, for example, while the gear shifts are being tweaked to achieve a satisfyingly modern clunk. Like the original, it's also switchable between two- and four-wheel drive using the same transfer box. Heated seats, air-con and a decent sound system are the only brand-new additions, though more can be requested if required.

Pulling away, the vehicle feels confident and steady under its new electric power source, but soon begins to produce a familiar rattle before rolling and rocking around corners in precisely the manner you'd hope that it would.

While some electric convertor operations are proudly putting ludicrously high-powered motors into the Land Rover simply because they can, this version produces 135hp and hits 62mph in a fairly solid 13 seconds — and it certainly feels plenty enough.

"One of the key things that we try to do with every one of the cars is to not break what wasn't broken," says Everrati's director of engineering, Mike Kerr. "The Porsche retains its original analogue feel and the series II is the same. It's quirky, the ergonomics are slightly off, but it's a really great, characterful drive. We didn't want to destroy that."

The instant torque also makes off-roading a whole lot easier than the convoluted art — or faff — it used to be. A range of 150 miles sounds on the low side when judged against an EV daily driver, but this is unlikely to be that.

"With a series IIA, you need your chiropractor with you if you do over about 50 miles anyway," says Lunny, a former fintech entrepreneur who started Everrati in 2019, inspired by the electric E-Type at the previous year's royal wedding, in which Harry whisked off Meghan. "They're not about commuting. Frankly, they're probably for driving from your country house down to where the horses are. And why wouldn't you?"

The £150,000 price tag is high, largely thanks to the work that goes into each one, but could come down as the scale gradually increases, perhaps to a few hundred of each model in a few years. The waiting list is already at six months.

As battery tech advances, customers could feasibly come back for an upgrade. Or even a full combustion engine reversal. After driving this version, though, that latter scenario looks rather unlikely.

"The hardest thing has been getting people to understand what we do," says Lunny. Now the cars are here, they're starting to get it. ○

everrati.com

Charlie Surbey

See you at the Yards

A high-end new eating and shopping zone aims to revitalise London retail and hospitality, over a G&T or two

By Johnny Davis

The high street is dead. Long live the high street. That's broadly the message behind Borough Yards, a "large-scale shopping and dining district" opening this spring directly adjacent to Borough Market, one of the biggest and oldest food markets in London, in Southwark, just south of the River Thames. Built within existing Victorian railway arches, Borough Yards will be home to 50-odd new shops, bars and restaurants, with names including Barrafina, Paul Smith, Aesop, Hawksmoor and Cubitts.

While there's been little but doom and gloom to report for the high street over the past few years — with the most common complaints being a) they all look the same, and b) it's cheaper on the internet — the team behind the £300m development wouldn't be doing what they're doing if they thought they couldn't offer something you can't get from Deliveroo and Black Friday. The term "retail theatre" is being bandied about.

"What we need to be looking at is the opportunity of what the high street can bring," says Trevor Morriss of Borough Yards' architects SPPARC. "The first thing we wanted is for the progression from the Market to feel really

Above: the £300m mixed-use development of new shopping district Borough Yards has been designed in symbiosis with the locale's 8,500sq m Victorian railway arches

natural. You don't want to feel like you're crossing a threshold into 'a shopping complex'."

The design will be of a piece within the existing arches — an example of grand Victorian architecture you probably don't want to mess with. "They're some of the most imposing structures you've ever seen," says Morriss. "I mean, they're amazing. I think if we were to draw these now and say to our clients, 'We'd like to build these, please', they'd laugh in our faces. The arches are so complex in terms of their geometry and their detail. But, of course, the guys who built them 150 years ago didn't have drawings. They just knew that, to get from A to B, they had to put these arches together. They're just incredible, inspiring Victorian structures."

Another bonus: restaurants will be able to get their produce fresh from Borough Market. "It's right there," says Morriss. "That's not some romantic idea. It's been designed for exactly that. You won't be importing your potatoes from goodness-knows-where. It's a natural evolution of the area."

James Hart, of the Harts Group, owners of Quo Vadis, El Pastor, Barrafina and others, has had his eye on the area for a while. "We have been looking at this site for a very long time," he says. "We wanted to know if it would suit us stylistically. We already knew it had a great mix of people who work locally. There's a big tourist thing surrounding Borough Market, both national and international tourism. It's an incredibly diverse mix of people, and that makes it very attractive. It's quite food-centric as well, obviously."

The Harts Group will be opening not one, but four new ventures there. Another Barrafina, two new sites for Parrillan, their terrace bar and table-top grill venture currently at another "shopping and dining district", Coal Drops Yard in King's Cross, and Bar Daskal, a wine bar named after the Harts' grandfather, Vladimir Daskalof, serving a fine selection of Spanish offerings.

"He was an artist," says Hart, of Daskalof. "So the idea was to use his artwork and create a space where people could have long gin and tonics in nice glassware, surrounded by great art, eating some great ham and olives." ("Sign us up now, quite frankly," offered one headline. And that was from 2021.)

"Nothing's foolproof," says Hart. "But we're working super-hard to make sure it all comes together. And Borough Yards is the kind of space that London needs. It should be incredible." ○

Borough Yards opens this spring; Stoney Street, London SE1 9AD; boroughyards.com

Below, from top: the Paul Smith store at Borough Yards; at Barrafina, the modern Spanish tapas bar that will be one of four new locations by the Harts Group to feature at the shopping district; James Hart, Sam Hart and Crispin Somerville, the trio behind Harts Group

Claire Menary | Greg Funnell

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Photograph: Pamela Hanson

Robert Pattinson's Batman overlooks Gotham City in Matt Reeves's upcoming film, 'The Batman'

Courtesy of Warner Bros Pictures/ ™ & © DC Comics

Something in the way

Director Matt Reeves's Batman reboot is inspired by 1970s cinema, 1980s comic books and... Nirvana

By Johnny Davis

With great power comes great responsibility. Yes, we know that's a different superhero, but how is the director of *The Batman* feeling?

"Terrified," says Matt Reeves.

The journey to the screen of the new Batman movie has been a long and gruelling one. Almost a decade ago, Ben Affleck was cast as the Caped Crusader in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. It is Affleck's most successful film at the box-office. By every other metric it was a disaster: critics hated it, fans hated it more and it launched DC down a route of superhero ensemble movies (*Suicide Squad*; *Justice League*) that got worse and worse. For every new star in an ever-more-twinkling Marvel Cinematic Universe, rival DC couldn't catch a break. The memory of Christopher Nolan's benchmark *The Dark Knight* trilogy appeared to be going gently into that good night. The best bet for Bat fans looked like another outing for Lego Batman, which at least was funny. But DC wanted another Batman movie.

They put in a call to Matt Reeves, director of the acclaimed monster movie *Cloverfield* (2008), as well as *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017). "Ben [Affleck] had been working on a version of the script," Reeves says, "and I said, 'Here's the thing: I respect that the DC Universe has become an extended universe and all the movies were kind of connected. But another Batman film, it shouldn't have to carry the weight of connecting the characters from all those other movies. I didn't want them in there."

A Batman movie without Aquaman (he can control sea life), Cyborg (he's a cyborg) or any of the rest of the corny Justice League characters already sounded like a 100 per cent improvement. As Robert Pattinson — we'll get to him — says in a two-minute promotional showreel for the →

new film, “Batman has stood out as one of the major characters of the 20th century, and so many people connect with it on such a deep level for so many reasons.” He deserved better.

Reeves’s next issue was this. Sure, you could reboot Batman — it’s been done dozens of times since he first appeared in Detective Comics in 1939, almost certainly more. But would anyone have the stomach for yet another retelling of his origin story, from a slightly different angle? “We’ve seen it so many times,” Reeves says. “It’s been done too much. I knew we couldn’t do that.”

He set about a ton of reading and was blown away by the comic *Batman: Year One*, the 1987 four-issue run by writer Frank Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli, that showed a young and in-turmoil Bruce Wayne figuring out how to be a vigilante. The tone is detective noir, the violence is street-level and nasty, and you will search in vain for a feat of superhero derring-do or a groaning Mr Freeze “Allow-me-to-break-the-ice”-style pun. Calling *Batman: Year One* realistic would be a stretch. But it is somewhere near as realistic as a comic book about a mentally dubious loner who puts on a disguise and begins hunting criminals come night. This proto-Batman underestimates his opponents, gets shot by the police, and his costume doesn’t fit. (It’s great, and it happens to be my favourite comic book.) Other influences on Reeves included New Hollywood classics from the 1970s: *The French Connection*, *Chinatown* and *Taxi Driver*. Also, Kurt Cobain.

“Early on, when I was writing, I started listening to Nirvana, and there was something about [*Nevermind* song] ‘Something in the Way’, which is in the first trailer, which is part of the voice of that character. When I considered, ‘How do you do Bruce Wayne in a way that hasn’t been seen before?’ I started thinking, ‘What if some tragedy happened [ie: Wayne sees his parents murdered] and this guy becomes so reclusive, we don’t know what he’s doing? Is this guy some kind of wayward, reckless, drug addict?’ And the truth is that he is a kind of drug addict. His drug is his addiction to this drive for revenge. He’s like a Batman Kurt Cobain.”

Batman’s main opponent in *The Batman* is The Riddler. Not the Jim Carrey version in the lime-green catsuit covered in question marks from Val Kilmer’s *Batman Forever* (1995). But a costumeless, schlubby Paul Dano interpretation, who communicates with the police via cyphers, based on the Zodiac Killer. Batman is one superhero without superpowers — but he is “the world’s greatest detective”. Reeves’s Batman, to the shock and awe of The Internet when it was announced in 2019, is Robert Pattinson.

‘The Batman shouldn’t have to carry the weight of connecting the characters from all the other DC movies. I didn’t want them in there’ (clockwise from top left): Matt Reeves on set with Robert Pattinson; Pattinson’s take on a Kurt Cobain-inspired Bruce Wayne; Zoë Kravitz as Selina Kyle/Catwoman

“Of course, the idea [to fit with the *Year One* story] was to make him a younger actor,” he says. “And in the process of writing the movie, I watched [the fantastic 2017 Safdie brothers film] *Good Time*, and I thought, ‘Okay, he’s got an inner kind of rage that connects with this character and a dangerousness, and I can feel this desperation.’ And I became dead-set on it being Rob. And I had no idea if Rob had any interest! Because, of course, he had done all of these indie movies after he established himself in *Twilight*.”

Unbeknownst to Reeves — or presumably anyone at DC — he had one thing on his side: Pattinson was a huge Batman fan. “He’d heard that we were doing this and got excited about the idea that there was going to be another version of this character,” Reeves says. “And so when I met him, and he read the script, we talked for a long, long time and I realised, ‘This guy is a massive fan’.”

Pattinson fit the part — but he still had to audition. Ridiculously, he did so in Val Kilmer’s old Batsuit. “Warner Brothers are like, ‘Look, we’re not going to make anything for somebody for a screentest’. But you go there [into WB] and they’ve got all the suits, going back to Michael Keaton. They said, ‘Look, we’ve done this on every single one. [Christian] Bale came in and he put on one of the original suits.’

Courtesy of Warner Bros Pictures/ ™ & © DC Comics | Landmark Media

"I'm not going to say it fitted well," Reeves continues. "But it fitted the best. It was sort of old, and as he started acting, he started heating up the cowl and the cowl started to sag on his face. You could see him thinking, 'How am I going to act in this suit?' But putting on a Batman suit is also transformative. You start to feel the power of having that armour on."

Completing the Grunge Gotham vibe, as the 31m people who saw *The Batman* trailer in its first 24 hours noticed, Pattinson's Batman is wearing emo-eyeliner. What's up with that?

"You can't wear a cowl and not wear that. All of the Batmen wear that," says Reeves, not entirely convincingly. "I just loved the idea of taking off [the mask] and under that there's the sweating and the dripping and the whole theatricality of becoming this character."

One of the things that makes the Batman character so interesting is that he's so malleable. He can be campy Adam West from the 1960s or angry Christian Bale from the 2000s — and both are equally valid. By an overwhelming majority, the YouTube comments section is going crazy for the "I'm vengeance!" this-guy's-nuts punchiness of Pattinson's 2020s version, based on two or three trailers. But it's fair to say that not everyone thought the skinny guy from *Twilight* was a stroke of genius casting.

"There has been no actor, when his announcement that he was going to be playing Batman in one of the feature films was announced, that has not received a backlash," Reeves says.

"The people who were excited, I knew it was because they knew Rob's work post-*Twilight*. The people who weren't excited, I knew it was because they didn't know Rob's work post-*Twilight*."

What about the other iconography that comes with the character, however you choose to tell his story? In *The Batman*, Wayne Manor is depicted as falling to bits — "He doesn't care about any of the trappings of being a [millionaire] Wayne at this point," Reeves says, citing Gus Van Sant's *Last Days*, the 2005 fictionalised version of Kurt Cobain's sad, slow demise (just like that film, we'll apparently see amps stacked up in a storage room).

The new Batcave is based on a secret underground railway that still exists in New York. "The idea being that some of these wealthy industrialist families had private train cars at the turn of the century. So the Batcave is actually in the foundation of this tower. It was [another] way of saying, 'How can we root all these things in things that feel real, but also extraordinary?'"

And finally, a new Batmobile. "The Nolan films established the Batmobile as a tank, which was a brilliant idea," Reeves says. "But I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool if this guy is a loner and a gearhead and fashioning these things by himself, taking parts of other cars and kit cars?' So it's recognisable as a car this time. But it's like a muscle car. One that he's made himself."

Reeves says it's daunting but also hugely exciting to see his Batman come to life — he is days away from finishing the film when this interview takes place in late 2021.

"I'm very proud of it. I felt it was the best version of the story that we could possibly do to justify having another *Batman*," he says. "You always have to have a reason, and from the beginning that was the mission for me." Sequels and Gotham City-based spin-offs are being planned. It's safe to assume they will remain Aquaman-free. At least for now. "It will obviously have a lot to do with how people receive this film," Reeves says. "But a lot of things are in the works."

When Bruce Wayne/Batman first goes looking for criminals in *Batman: Year One*, there is one frame in which Reeves noted that "he's dressed in what I thought looked like an image out of *Taxi Driver*". Some of Frank Miller's notes to David Mazzucchelli are included at the back of a commemorative edition of *Year One,* published a few years ago. Of that same frame, Miller writes he wanted Batman "to basically look like he's won a *Taxi Driver*-lookalike competition". Reeves laughed out loud when he read that. They were literally on the same page.

At the start of this article, there was one DC film we overlooked. One that bucked its run of rum luck — and did so in spectacular style. That film was 2019's double-Oscar-winning *Joker*. A key influence on that? Also *Taxi Driver*. Don't bet that Batman isn't about to rise again. ○

The Batman is released in cinemas on 4 March

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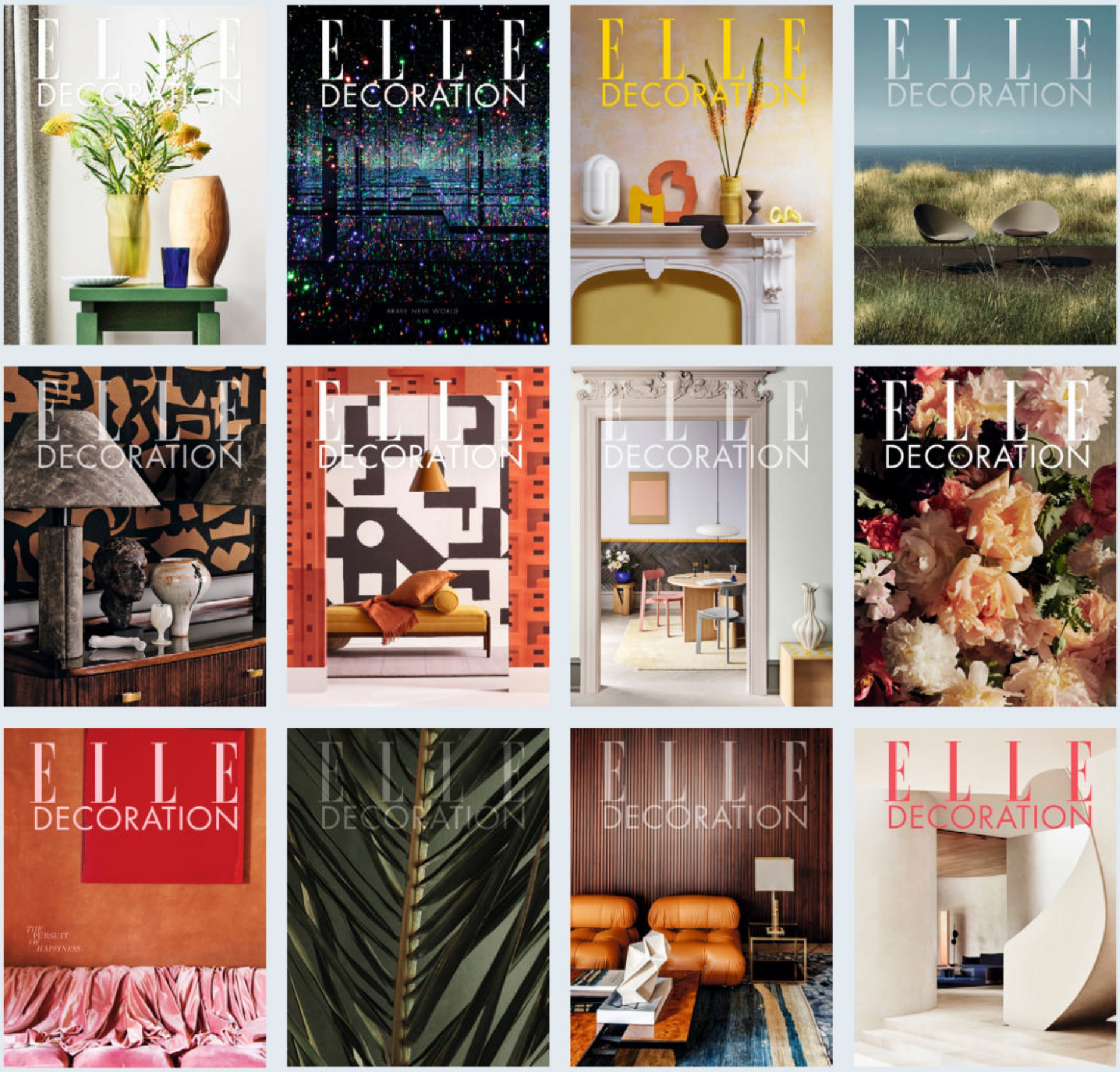

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Dark matters: Dolce & Gabbana's bejewelled black offering for SS '22 typifies a stylistic shift in menswear's approach to suiting

Back to black

Summer tailoring goes dark

By Murray Clark

Ask to try on a black suit at a traditional tailor, or even a less traditional one, and you're likely to be steered in the direction of something midnight blue, charcoal or even dark brown. Not black. Most men's outfitters, especially in the UK, would never recommend black for anything other than a funeral. There's black tie, of course, but that's a different thing altogether — and never to be worn unless the occasion strictly requires it. For the most part, formal menswear codes dictate that black is for widowers.

This spring, fashion says to hell with such diktats. Two-piece suits can be found in an array of cuts and silhouettes and styles, all united by one thing: any colour, as Henry Ford liked to say, as long as it's black.

Some labels, especially the Italians, have been doing this beautifully for years. Dolce & Gabbana is the exemplar. It's been putting olive-skinned Sicilians in the sharpest monochrome tailoring for decades now, and sending them out into the sweltering sun looking hot, in a good way.

For the brand's spring/summer show, the signature black suit was put on a strong course of steroids: brawny lapels, a slightly sexy fit, and a troika of brooches so big and bejewelled that they'd put royalty to shame. At Dunhill, jackets were boxier and seemed to hang off the body, as opposed to drowning it. Even Paul Smith, a man who built an empire based on colour, sent out black suits this season. And Dior's Kim Jones also made a compelling case for black tailoring, adding clever touches to inject light into the dark, like with an overcoat, also in black, free of any superfluous embellishment with the exception of Sgt Pepper embroidery on the sleeves. A coat to be worn at the memorial to the lost, presumed sunken, Yellow Submarine. ○

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Ice cold

Is your cool box as hot as a Yeti?

By Charlie Teasdale

Cool story: available in a plethora of colours and designed to withstand the elements, the Tundra ice chest is Yeti's hero piece

For a company so concerned with keeping things cold, being cool is of little interest to Yeti. The portable cooler brand was established in Texas in 2006 by two fishermen who couldn't find a cooler that would stand up to a full day at the reel. "Out of this frustration came the Tundra," says Matt Reintjes, president and CEO of Yeti, referring to the brand's flagship box. "We wanted it to keep ice for days and be durable enough to withstand the demands of any serious angler."

Since then, the product range has grown to include camping chairs, dog beds and T-shirts. But despite all the lifestyle goods, it's the utilitarian cooling kit that has emerged as a valuable unit of cultural currency. Recently, the windows of Goodhood, the high-fashion boutique in east London, were dressed with a stack of Yeti kit. (A 22-litre "Load Out" bucket is not what you expect to see at a store known for selling limited-edition trainers, but there it was.) And if you were to visit the chic Epi 1959 hotel near Saint-Tropez, you would find individual pink Yeti boxes at the foot of each sun lounger.

In news that will surely augment the first barbecue of the season, somehow, completely by accident, Yeti has become the coolest way to keep things cold. "If people enjoy our product and storytelling and think what we do is cool, then great, but it's not our intention," explains Reintjes. "We love the outdoors and staying true to that and to those who share our common love is all we've ever been obsessed about." ○

Tundra cool box, from £250, by Yeti; yeti.com

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Boys keep swinging

Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat's pugilistic 'bromance' becomes a punchy new play

By Miranda Collinge

Richard Drew/ AP/ Shutterstock

Above: Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, September 1985

"It's like a sophisticated boxing match," is how Kwame Kwei-Armah, artistic director of London's Young Vic, describes *The Collaboration*, the new play he is directing. Written by Anthony McCarten (*Bohemian Rhapsody*, *The Theory of Everything*), *The Collaboration* explores the period in the early 1980s when two iconic artists, Jean-Michel Basquiat, who will be played by the American actor Jeremy Pope, and Andy Warhol, played by the British actor Paul Bettany, worked together on a wildly hyped joint exhibition in New York.

Basquiat's star was in the ascendant, Warhol's on the wane, and some friction was inevitable; the poster for their 1985 exhibition featured both artists in boxing gloves. "It was billed as this huge competition between the great god of the art world and the upstart superstar, and the play is written in that way," says Kwei-Armah. "You can see the little jabs and you can see the big blows and you can feel the one-twos. But by the time we get to the second act, and the two men start to know each other, we begin to get inside who they really are."

Speaking to *Esquire* in early December, two weeks before the first workshop with Bettany and Pope in New York, Kwei-Armah suggests that, ultimately, Warhol and Basquiat's relationship was far from pugilistic. "I keep wanting to say 'bromance', but that just sounds too male-heavy. But actually, these two men fall in love with each other, and I don't mean sexually: I mean for each other as people, and for their art. The play captures Warhol and captures the beauty and pain of Basquiat. I couldn't resist saying yes."

Kwei-Armah was not alone in seeing the appeal of the script. A Hollywood movie adaptation is in the works, reportedly due to start production as soon as the Young Vic run finishes in April. But, Kwei-Armah says, for now the play is centre-stage. "I want to concentrate on the thing that's directly in front of me and make it as hot as possible at the YV." You wouldn't bet against him. ○

The Collaboration is at the Young Vic Theatre, London SE1, from 16 February – 2 April; youngvic.org

Fired up

At London's hottest new restaurant, a Mexican superchef offers the history of her nation on a plate

By Nick Pope

When Adriana Cavita learned that the opening of her first restaurant, Cavita, in Marylebone, London, would have to be delayed by seven months because of construction issues, she did what most frustrated chefs would do: set up shop at a few food festivals across the capital, fiddled with some recipes and twiddled her thumbs. Then she did what most frustrated chefs would not do: joined one of the oldest living indigenous communities in Mexico on their annual sacred pilgrimage through several hundred miles of jungles, springs and deserts.

For Cavita, such adventures are nothing new. The Mexico City native, who honed her craft at some of the world's best restaurants, including Pujo in Mexico City, Aska in New York, and the legendary El Bulli in Catalonia, has spent years travelling across her homeland in search of its heritage. She has immersed herself in small communities that protect and nurture the land, while picking up rustic cooking methods that stretch back centuries along the way. Her new restaurant, set to open on Wigmore Street this April, is fuelled by a desire to keep those traditions alive.

"I learned the history of Mexico through food," Cavita says, recalling the diverse fruits, vegetables and spices of the local markets, and the eight different languages you might overhear during a single Oaxacan grocery trip. Family, too: her grandfather grew corn, beans and pumpkins on their farm in her youth. Her grandmother magicked these ingredients into

'Mexican food is about bringing people together': chef Adriana Cavita, below, takes her nation's food, below right, to its zenith at debut venture Cavita

Lucy Richards

"*antojitos*", street food to sell outside of their house. Cavita wants her recipes to shed light on the aspects of Mexico that a taco-hunting tourist rarely sees. "We cannot speak about food without speaking about the regions, and the people who live in these regions," she says. "I always tasted the best food in these communities."

Inevitably, our conversation arrives at a hallowed word in Mexican cuisine: barbacoa. An open-fire kitchen will sit at the heart of the new restaurant, where Cavita and her team will grill and smoke meats — slow-cooked pork wrapped in banana leaf, whole fish split in half from head to tail, and chargrilled corn-fed chicken — over flames of burning charcoal and wood. The positioning of the grill was the most important aspect to her; a call-back to the traditional kitchens of old — which sat at the centre of the house with an oven made up of three stones and a griddle, called a "*tlecuil*" — and to the ancient roots of all Mexican cooking. "The Aztecs used to have this connection with fire," she says. "I think that it will bring soul to the restaurant and the food."

Then there's the freshly made *moles*, the mother sauce of Mexican cooking that has achieved national-dish status. Like her mother, Cavita follows the traditional Amarillo approach, which is simple, soupy and spicy — though she scales back the heat for Londoners. (She learned the hard way at her previous restaurant, Peyotito in Notting Hill, where she was head chef, that "people need to go slowly on the *moles*".) Much like the Baja fish tacos and the cactus-based nopal salad and just about everything else in the restaurant, it's designed to be shared.

"Mexican food is about bringing people together: families, communities," says Cavita, who will also host a six-seater chef's table by the open kitchen. "Nothing crazy or extravagant. For me, sometimes the simple things are more elegant."

It's a far cry from the sizzling fajita plates, bandito cartoons and comedy-sized margaritas that came to define London's "Tex-Mex" restaurant scene in the 2000s. In place of the latter will be a mezcal bar specialising in fairtrade batches that support the communities that harvest the agave plant and distil the drink. "[I'm choosing mezcals] that are doing something to keep the production of the agave at a healthy level in Mexico," she says, "because it's important to keep these traditions alive." Situated downstairs, Cavita compares the bar to an ochre-coloured cave, "like you're going inside of the Earth".

But for now, food is at the forefront of her mind. And not just because she's still got a menu to complete."We love to eat. Mexican culture is like that," she says. "We wake up and say, 'Okay, let's think about breakfast', then as soon as we've had breakfast we say, 'What are we going to have for lunch?'" ○

Cavita, 56 Wigmore Street, London W1; cavita restaurant.com

'The simple things are more elegant': classic Mexican dishes like whole fish split in half, below, and techniques including charcoal-grilling, below right, will take centre-stage at Cavita

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The shorts of the season (from left) by Lanvin, Ermenegildo Zegna, Hermès, Dior, Paul Smith, Giorgio Armani, and Dries van Noten

Getty | Imaxtree

What goes up

Long shorts return

By Charlie Teasdale

For menswear aficionados, the question of ideal short length has been a source of heated debate for some years. Last summer, a five-inch inseam dominated thanks to the popularity of Patagonia's "Baggies", a do-anything sports short available in a range of outdoorsy colours. (They were sold out everywhere; the seven-inch version was readily available but, clearly, widely shunned.) But what goes up must come down, and according to a hefty portion of the spring/summer 2022 shows, hems will descend as the temperature rises this year. At Dries van Noten, Lanvin, Giorgio Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna, Fendi, Paul Smith, Dior, Rick Owens, Hermès and (even) more, shorts are substantially volumised. At their longest, they loiter at the shin, while the shortest rarely venture above the knee, and many feature pleats and/or pockets to increase overall surface area. Styling advice tends to be tonal, with designers championing oversized, monochromatic themes, and socks are recommended, especially if you're wearing your big shorts with trainers. ○

Introducing the Esquire Edit

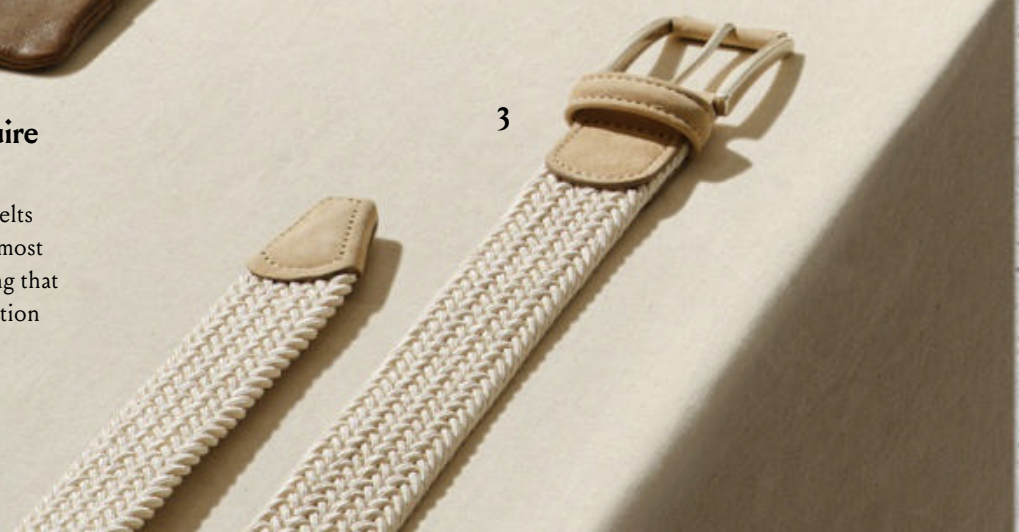
Esquire is proud to present the fourth edition of the Esquire Edit, our capsule collection of wardrobe essentials made in collaboration with Liberty, and some of our favourite menswear brands. This year, the collection will be available in-store and online at Liberty, as well as the brands' respective websites and stores

5. Cotton shirt by Esquire x NN07, £130

A complete essential for any winter wardrobe, NN07's Silas overshirt, realised in *Esquire* off-white, features two chest pockets and is cut with a square, boxy hem, so is perfect for layering up over knitwear and sweats.

4. Selvedge denim jeans by Esquire x Edwin, £190

An icon of the denim universe, Edwin has been making incredible jeans since 1947. For this year's Edit, we have a special edition of the regular tapered fit in mid-blue rainbow selvedge denim — the ultimate go-anywhere, do-anything pair of jeans.



1. Sunglasses by Esquire x Kirk Originals, £225

Founded in 1919, Kirk Originals is one of the best in the business. These Kirven frames, shaped from tortoiseshell acetate, are finished with *Esquire* off-white detailing.

2. Pouch by Esquire x Ally Capellino, £50

A pouch will always come in handy, and the leather of this Ally Capellino number will take on a patina as you use it, only making it cooler as the years go on.

3. Woven belt by Esquire x Anderson's, £90

Anderson's makes all of its belts in Italy and is really the foremost name in the industry, offering that perfect mix of supreme function and classic, timeless form.

6. Graphic knit sweater by Esquire x NN07, £200

The first graphic knit to feature in the Edit, but what a knit it is. Dress up with trousers and black lace-ups, or dress down with the Edwin jeans and a pair of trainers.

7. Backpack by Esquire x Ally Capellino, £650

Ally Capellino is one of the stalwart brands in leather accessories, and the Hoy backpack, with its Calvert leather and webbing straps, is super tough, but also equipped with clever storage.

8. Seersucker trousers by Esquire x YMC, £150

Named in honour of skate legend Tony Alva, these YMC trousers are a testament to slacker style: loose cut, with a tapered, gently cropped leg and a drawstring waist. Worn with the Doc Savage shirt, they complete the essential un-suit.

9. Shawl-collar cardigan by Esquire x Oliver Spencer, £270

Made by one of our favourite designers, this cardigan has real Steve-McQueen-in-the-Hamptons vibes. It's snug, and will look great with a certain pair of mid-blue denim jeans.

10. Seersucker overshirt by Esquire x YMC, £150

Made in black seersucker, with *Esquire* off-white detailing, YMC's Doc Savage shirt treads the line between utility and elegance. It has the workwear vibe, but the seersucker elevates everything to an altogether sleeker place.

11. Two-tone loafers by Esquire x Duke + Dexter, £240

One of the surprise essentials of the season, we couldn't launch this year's Edit without a pair of two-tone penny loafers. These are by Duke + Dexter, one of the most exciting brands in the UK.

12. Cotton crew-neck sweatshirt by Esquire x Sunspel, £115

Sunspel's classic loopback sweatshirt — in *Esquire* off-white with contrast collar detailing — is cosy and warm and perfect for lazy days, but plenty slick enough for work, too.

13. Cotton and silk scarf by Esquire x Liberty, £210

The prints at Liberty are world-famous, so we're delighted to have an exclusive for the *Esquire* Edit. This scarf is a cotton and silk mix, so it's extraordinarily soft, but with a weight suitable for the chilly winter months.

14. Cotton polo shirt by Esquire x Sunspel, £135

Sunspel's classic Riviera polo was originally tailored for Daniel Craig's James Bond in *Casino Royale*, so not only does it offer that enduring style, but we know it can also handle the rigours of the life of a Double-O.

15. Cotton crew-neck T-shirt by Esquire x Sunspel, £80

Sunspel's mastery of cotton basics is unparalleled, as this two-tone T-shirt attests. Lightweight, ultrafine, long staple Pima cotton — and, above all, the perfect fit.

David Lineton

JOURNAL

The great outdoors

I DO LIKE TO BE

Andrew O'Hagan

EVERY MAN GETS TO BE MORE OR LESS HAMLET. But the question is not so much "to be or not to be" as to be beside the sea or not. In my younger and more vulnerable years, I hated going to the beach, because the one close to us smelled quite strongly of recently evacuated poo. There was a reason for that, as I once pointed out to my *Esquire* colleague Will Self, when he was restaurant critic for *The Observer*. I was in a restaurant with him on this particular evening and, there on the menu and taking Will's fancy, was "Troon-landed cod". It has a certain ring to it, doesn't it, Troon-landed cod? Offering an image of silvery fish darting through barnacled rocks and clear, green Scottish waters. But it was my duty to point out that any fish landed in Troon at that time had just enjoyed the environs of Garroch Head on the island of Bute, where the sludge boats *SS Dalmarnock* and *SS Shieldhall* had, since the year 1904, set out every day to dump 6,000 tonnes of untreated Glasgow sewage. (The practice has since been outlawed, so chomp away, Ginger!)

The British beach holiday was always a hazardous prospect. Apart from swimming in the then-questionable fluids, there were the dependably sub-zero temperatures, the knitted trunks, the sand that was actually mud, the seagulls that were actually pterodactyls, the rain that was actually snow, and the constant whimpering of children who felt, with no end of justification, that the seaside was an advanced form of psychological shock therapy with fish and chips at the end. Tiddley-om-pom-pom! But progress is definitely a thing and, before too long, most of us had found there was a secret seaside, existing in the dubious territory known as Abroad. When I was 20, a pal of mine who worked for a travel agent got us a free holiday in the Canary Islands. It were right nice. Suddenly, after years of standing on the pier hoping the huge grabby-machine in the sky would take me out, I was sashaying out of my hotel like Princess Margaret with a gin fizz. I had beach towels, FFS. I had lunch appointments at the cabana and bars with regular ice. There were cold beers and disco beats and brand-new unguents: suncream, for instance. The Scottish suntan (ie an uneven pattern of second-degree burns) was a thing of the past, and so was the refreshing taste of hot Tizer. I snorkelled in azure seas and was wafted asleep by palm trees.

"You've changed," my family said. But they couldn't have known how much. I now lived in a dreamland fantasy of blue guitars, pink umbrellas, mint juleps and concierges who knew the timings of all the boats. A few years later, when a magazine asked me to choose a place on the planet to write about, I went through the performance, with my girlfriend, of spinning a globe and stopping it at random; my thumb had been on Bora Bora the whole time, though, so we headed to the South Pacific to be on Elvis-Time. But something weird happened. Reader, I got hammock fatigue. Yes, there were sawn-off coconuts filled with liqueurs. Yes, you could see the fish at the bottom of the surf. Day by day, we turned a light golden brown and read fat American novels about the modern condition. The breeze was lovely. But I can't tell you how bored we became. The birds of paradise began, before long, to look exactly like wallpaper, and so did the underpaid workers, who were bussed in from shanty towns to wear grass skirts and say "*Ia ora na*" (good morning) to the rich Westerners.

That's right — every beach is a minefield. In one of last year's most talked-about TV shows, *The White Lotus*, a similar problem arises when two college sophomores, Olivia and Paula, are horrified by the situation of native workers at the hotel resort where Olivia's rich parents have taken them on holiday, so Paula conspires to make a political intervention. The problem is deftly handled in the show; very funny, hugely alarming and definitely true. It seems so hilariously millennial, the girls' clear-but-deluded take on it all — reading Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* on their sun-loungers — but the fact is that everybody's former innocence about the seaside has been zapped. It's not just the colonial thing or the appropriation thing (turning

Martin Parr/Magnum Photos

Goa into Margate and Margate into Goa); it's the sense that the seaside is an inheritance you either do or don't look after. Now that spring is on the way, we begin to yearn for the sun and a bit of otherness, but you're bound nowadays to ask yourself if that's OK, and if one person's resort is another person's plantation. On cheap postcards, I began writing the message "I wish I wasn't here", and I found myself — please, no, don't let it happen — yearning for the unclear waters of home.

I'm holding out for hologram holidays. Now that I've seen *Whitney Houston Live* — 10 years after she died — I'm ready for my first "tropical holiday experience" in Camden Town, which will involve beaches so expansive and harmless, you could play rounders on them with Greta Thunberg and her mates and still have some virtue to burn. "No workers were exploited in the making of this seaside-holiday experience," it will say. Plus, you can drink your own drinks, eat your own chips, dance to your own music, and chat your own shit to people who are chatting their own shit, too. You can pretend that your own currency is the only currency that matters. You can refuse the language of others. You can walk on a foreign beach like the beach was inside you and nowhere else. You've lived the dream: now you can dream the life. And then you can go all over again without really going anywhere at all. In every respect, you'll just have had a fortnight in Ibiza. ○

Embarrassing bodies

BRUXIT

Olivia Ovenden

IF THERE IS A HUMAN EQUIVALENT TO THE CONE OF SHAME — the plastic funnel that breaks the hearts of dog owners when they are obliged to secure it around the neck of their sickly pets — it is, perhaps, the teeth-grinding retainer. Like labrasomethingdoodles and cockerwhateverpoos who must be prevented from licking their wounds, we teeth grinders have the forlorn air of creatures who know we cannot be trusted.

The hottest accessory of the year found its way into my mouth after the routine — pull the other one — dental check-up that now neatly divides my life into "before" and "after". Barely had we dispensed with formalities when the dentist informed me that I was grinding my teeth at such a rate I'd soon have nothing left to chew with. "Your teeth look 30 years older than you," she said cheerfully, as though that was a compliment. There is something confessional about opening your mouth for a stranger and offering up a record of what you eat, drink and smoke, and this encounter felt especially steeped in shame. I left, tail between legs, with a mouthguard that didn't look unlike the one I'd worn to play lacrosse at school, but came with the Apple Store price-tag of £400. Suddenly, the cone of shame didn't look so terrible; at least you could pretend not to be able to hear people.

I've come to realise the only person harder to please than your parents is your dentist, and to accept the increasing humiliations they inflict on you as you age. A recommendation to floss soon becomes tiny pipe-cleaners that must be dragged in and out of the gaps between your teeth after every meal. Mouthwash is no longer mildly minty but inspired by the potency of the Novichok nerve agent. Even the bills gain momentum as the years go by. With each visit, you leave committed to the holy grail of perfect teeth, clutching all the gear and with no idea that you'll return, months later, in an inordinate amount of trouble for not having done something you didn't know existed. Brushing, rinsing, flossing, eating sugar in concentrated periods, limiting black coffee — I swallowed all of it, but the news that I was grinding my teeth down, millimetre by millimetre, as I lay unconscious each night was, to put it kindly, taking the piss.

Recently, the actor Orlando Bloom was the object of ridicule after an interview in which he revealed he chants for 20 minutes every day "religiously", which wasn't to say he does it frequently but rather is a practising Buddhist. The piece was one of those troublingly heartfelt accounts of the daily rituals of celebrities, one in which Bloom talked about drinking something called "brain octane oil", in addition to other quasi-satanic rituals. In fairness, Bloom did admit it was all "quite LA", in a moment of self-awareness that betrayed his roots in Canterbury, not California. Lately, I have been thinking about the rituals of my day; more specifically, the fact that it begins with removing plastic from the grooves of my teeth and feeling my gums throb as they adjust to freedom. It doesn't matter if you run a six-minute mile or have sex with Harry Styles before end of play; if your day starts with taking out a gumshield, you never fully recover.

I can't say with any certainty when I became a teeth grinder, but bruxism — the medical term for grating your gnashers together with gusto — has been on the rise during the pandemic as our stress levels have shot up. In addition to hallucinogenic dreams and insomnia, teeth grinding is our body keeping score of what it's going through during the day, a grudge it then takes out on us while we're sleeping. Whether my teeth grinding can be blamed on the stress of a deadly global health crisis or something more deep-rooted is unclear — the dentist wasn't up for throwing in childhood trauma analysis with the mouthguard — but I suppose the real problem is that there is something animalistic about your body self-destructing willingly but without your consent.

Teeth grinders are creatures at war with themselves. We are the problem to which there is no solution, aside from the brutal gumshield, but that isn't so much a solution as a medical doorstop. We deserve our own public holiday to raise awareness, an earnest but ultimately flawed Netflix documentary, or, at the very least, an emoji. Come to

think of it, maybe the one with gritted teeth isn't actually an awkward grin but a reminder to unclench your jaw.

Sometimes, I sleep without it for special occasions or as a treat for my husband, who wonders, often aloud, whether a bike helmet is next on the sleep accoutrements wish list, in addition to the retainer, ear plugs and eye mask on rotation. Certainly, dying in my sleep doesn't have the tranquil allure it used to: imagine spending your last moments in a mouthguard. ○

Alamy | Getty Images

On tour

A TABLE FOR TWO

Caleb Azumah Nelson

WHEN FACED WITH UNFAMILIAR PLACES, I turn to music. Often, it is jazz, with its standards as a spine, because that idea of improvisation, of allowing fresh possibilities to arrive, seems particularly important when I'm away from home. On a recent journey to Vienna, beginning the European leg of my book tour, I opt for Nala Sinephro's new record, *Space 1.8*, which feels like an orchestral rendering of what it might mean to wander. This is music that is true to its name: there's space, between looping, endless synths, the slow, meditative drums, the steady bursts from a horn. This is music that takes its time, that encourages you to make peace with that wandering, rather than firmly holding onto a destination. I try to do this while travelling: to wander, to deviate from the standard, meander away from my day-to-day routine and find the freedom that emerges from this.

Despite my intentions, on the plane from London, I make plans for when I land: passport control, baggage, train, hotel, food, sleep, sleep, sleep. I am exhausted, not just from travel — most of October 2021 was spent away from home, touring cities in the UK — but from living in a space that constantly feels foreign, days fashioned mostly from anxiety. Over the past year and a half, in the face of chaos, I have found myself making plans and routines, trying to make safety.

It's not until I'm at passport control — and, by some coincidence, I'm standing next to one of my favourite musicians, jazz trumpeter Theo Croker, dreads cascading down his back, a slight smile on his face, who, noticing my gaze, engages me in quick, joyful conversation, and invites me to a gig he's playing in Vienna that evening — that I remember the shortcomings of my instinct towards routine. It's not until I shake myself awake from a nap and get dressed, walk across the city, the buildings quaint and pretty, light glittering across the night, *Space 1.8* in my ears once more, encouraging me to wander towards an intimate jazz club where purple and pink lights douse the audience and stage, that anticipation splits a smile on my face. It's not until the band make their way onto the stage, when I find my neck bobbing as the group dance with, around, towards each other, with their instruments, with their notes, it's not until the gig has come and gone that I remember, sometimes, safety is an illusion and on the other side might lie something beautiful.

A few days later, I fly to Zürich, and, after a reading, with little to no coaxing, I drink too many glasses of wine, spilling from one bar to another, eventually returning to my hotel as daylight is beginning to interrupt the darkness of the sky. When I wake up, it's early afternoon and, through the slight gap in the curtains, I see sunlight. I know it's too late to prevent a hangover, so instead I seek comfort, heading for somewhere that serves breakfast.

The place I choose is near capacity. There's no space for one but there is a table for two; there's another solo diner, a woman around the same age as me. We're asked if we would mind sharing a table. She hesitates, as do I. We both smile at this hesitation. I shrug, as if to ask the stranger, "Why not?". When we sit, we go back and forth a little. She tells me she's not from Zürich, that not many people are, and that she moved here, from Estonia, with her dog, who lazes in the space between our feet, to complete a PhD in neuroscience. She asks where I'm from, tapping the copy of Colson Whitehead's *Harlem Shuffle* I'm reading. When I tell her I'm from the UK, on tour, and she asks about my writing, my process, I'm back to jazz, talking about leaning →

into the unknown, even when faced with the enormity of a blank page, in the faith it will produce a moment that is worth it all. Like this one, us sharing a table and eventually leaving the restaurant, walking and talking through the streets of Zürich, where, unlike in London, it is already autumn, brown leaves crunching underfoot, yellows and reds trying to hang onto branches. Her dog darts ahead of us. It's pleasurable beyond what I could've imagined after I'd stumbled into bed at 5am, and I suppose this is what the willingness to wander presents: possibilities that stretch towards the infinite.

By the time I'm in Berlin a week later, I leave my hotel in the mornings with general ideas of what I want to do: see art, visit bookshops, meet friends. But, by now, I am allowing for interruptions and for being interrupted often. I let myself be enticed by the cinema and eat my weight in pulled pork and potatoes. I talk into the early hours of the morning with new friends and open another bottle when we should go to bed. I am following that wandering rhythm.

That is, until, on the way to a tapas bar to pick up a set of headphones I left there the night before, I am hit by a car. In the minutes and hours that follow, I replay the incident, asking if I was at fault. I wonder why the driver did not stop to check if I was OK instead of driving away. I realise I won't get an answer. I make peace with this. I allow the shock to run its course, making my way to the bar, retrieving my headphones and heading back to the hotel. I take a long shower and run a palm along my skin. Nothing is broken. The shock begins to wane. I message a friend, asking if they want to meet. I look at myself in the mirror and ask myself if I'm OK. I decide that I am. I dress and leave the hotel. It's golden hour and day is being consumed by night.

As I walk through Kreuzberg, dusk punctured by the glow of streetlights, I put my headphones on and let Sinephro's record play. I have to remind myself that, if I'm going towards the unknown, I'm still open to the possibilities that might hold. I have to remind myself, at the tail end of my trip, heading back to London the next day, as I'm watching others begin their evenings, making towards bars and restaurants and clubs, that alongside everything, the anxiety, the chaos, the uncertainty, there is joy to be had. There is beauty here, too. ○

Personal history

OJ RUINED MY HOLIDAY

Georgia Pritchett

IN 1994, I WON A HOLIDAY TO PHILADELPHIA. It was part of a promotion for the *Naked Gun* films, starring the unlikely trio of Leslie Nielson, OJ Simpson and Priscilla Presley. The same films responsible for classic lines such as — "It's the same old story. Boy finds girl, boy loses girl, girl finds boy, boy forgets girl, boy remembers girl, girls dies in a tragic blimp accident over the Orange Bowl on New Year's Day."

"Goodyear?"

"No, the worst."

The prize included flights to New York then flights on to Philadelphia, where a chauffeur-driven limo would pick us up at the airport and take us to a five-star hotel. For a whole week, the limo would be at our disposal and would drive us to all the top tourist attractions of the city.

I couldn't believe my luck. I'd never won anything before. I bought a travel guide and marked all the places I wanted to go. First of all, the Liberty Bell, because who wouldn't want to see a massive bell with a crack in it? Then the Rocky Steps (also known as the Philadelphia Museum of Art) because, even before social media, running up and down those steps was a must. And then the Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was drawn up and where you could take tours and look at old furniture and gaze upon those wonderful words: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

I'd never been in a limo before and I'd never stayed in a five-star hotel. And I still haven't. Because, while we were on the plane, OJ Simpson absolutely did not murder his wife and her friend, and the whole marketing for the film fell apart. I arrived in New York with the other "winners" in a huge thunderstorm, where we discovered our plane tickets to Philadelphia had mysteriously disappeared. Instead, hours later, a beaten-up truck appeared and a furious man drove us through the rain and the dark to Philadelphia. Not to a five-star hotel, but to a motel on the outskirts of the city. As we got out of the truck and the driver raced off, we could hear gunfire.

We went into the motel. It was filthy and the man behind the reception desk seemed very surprised to see us. I was shown to a room that had a curtain hanging off the rail and many mysterious stains (including on the ceiling). The air was thick with a smell that was difficult to identify, but my best guess is that it was some kind of combination of bodily fluids and despair. When I tried to close the curtain by attaching one end to a sticky patch on the wall, I saw several flashes of light in the darkness — more gunfire.

I put on my pyjamas and tentatively lifted the covers. There was a dark object at the bottom of the bed. I froze. Was it a spider? A cockroach? A rat? No. It was a sock. I felt sick.

While I removed the sock, using the remote controls (to a broken TV) as chopsticks, I wondered how the person occupying my room in the five-star hotel was getting on. Probably not removing hosiery from the bottom of the bed. I got dressed again in every piece of clothing I had brought and lay down cautiously on top of the bed. I turned the light off.

Immediately I heard strange noises. A sort of schllllffff schllllffff noise. I don't know what noise a giant spider who wants to lay eggs in your face makes, but pretty sure it's a schllllffff schllllffff noise. Then there was a clickety noise. The kind of noise an army of cockroaches might make when they spot their next meal. Then there was a sort of draggy, scuffly noise. Like a rat high on crack might make before it plunged its rabid incisors into your neck. I turned the light on again.

Eventually, I fell asleep, but was woken a couple of hours later by someone trying to kick the door down. My limo driver, maybe? Wanting to drive me to safety?

"Hello?" I said, politely. "Can I help?"

The person on the other side of the door yelled back. He didn't sound like a limo driver. He sounded like someone who was extremely angry about something. Was he the owner of the sock, perhaps? No — it emerged he was a pimp and he thought I was his ho.

I told him as courteously as possible that I was not his ho. But he did not believe me. I explained I had just arrived from England and that, despite what my ex-boyfriend might say, I was not a ho, had never been a ho and indeed did not know the whereabouts of said ho. I think I made a compelling argument, because he eventually went away. However, it can't have been that compelling, as he came back the next night and the next night and every night I was there, always at 2am and always attempting to enter the room by kicking the door down. The door, to my astonishment, remained intact. And while I started the week with polite apologies that I was not the ho in question, by the end of the week, I would just yell, half-asleep, "WRONG HO!" and he would wander off.

(Side note: while writing this piece, I looked the hotel up and found it is famous as one of the worst hotels in America. It had hundreds of bad reviews and just one good one. The good review said it had the "cheapest smack and hookers in Philly". One of the bad reviews said, "This place is terrible, dirty and disgusting. There was fossilised vomit on the floor." I wondered if it was my vomit from the sock encounter.)

One day, I decided to go and explore the city centre and find Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, but it was three bus rides away and I got horribly lost. Eventually, I decided to give up and get a taxi back to the hotel — but no taxi would take me. They said it was too dangerous.

So, instead, I decided to walk. I walked past derelict buildings, whole blocks of abandoned houses, litter piled high on the sidewalk, homeless people, addicts, young kids playing in a wasteland, boarded-up homes that were being lived in, burnt-out houses that looked on the point of collapse, people sleeping on the street. I saw devastating poverty. I saw things I'd never seen before. I saw graffiti-covered buildings (one wall had the words "I don't exist" scrawled on it), but I saw no other white people.

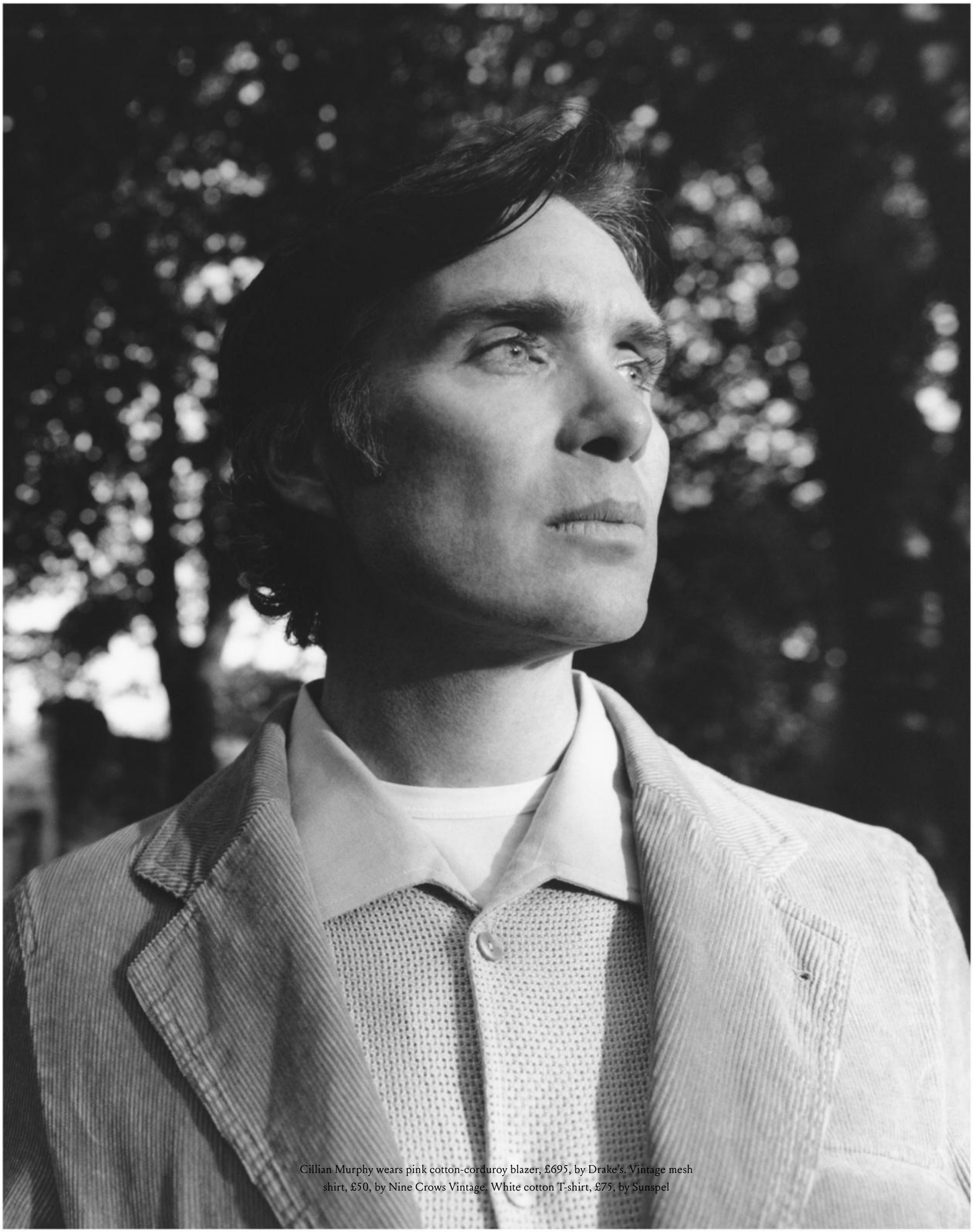
I flew home from Philadelphia, America's poorest big city, "city of brotherly love", having not seen the cracked bell but quite a few crack dens. And I didn't see where the Declaration of Independence was drawn up, but I saw where it fell down. It turned out all this talk of inalienable rights and equality had a hollow ring. Much like the bell, I imagine. ○

Eyevine

UNDER THE RADAR

As the tortured creator of the atomic bomb in Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer, the unassuming Irish actor Cillian Murphy is shortly to embark on his starriest film role to date. But first, there is the bruising business of bidding farewell — perhaps forever (perhaps, tantalisingly, not?) — to another tormented man of violence: the terrifying Tommy Shelby, of Peaky Blinders. At home in Dublin, on the eve of the 'dark as fuck' final series, Murphy reflects on his years as one of TV's greatest-ever gangsters and the tragic loss of his co-star, the 'magnificent' Helen McCrory

Interview by Miranda Collinge *Photographs by Tom Craig* *Styling by Charlie Teasdale*



Cillian Murphy wears pink cotton-corduroy blazer, £695, by Drake's. Vintage mesh shirt, £50, by Nine Crows Vintage. White cotton T-shirt, £75, by Sunspel

Beige cotton jacket, £2,030; green wool sleeveless cardigan, £865; sky-blue cotton Oxford shirt, £485, all by Gucci.
Blue denim jeans, £600, by Gucci at MatchesFashion. Grey acetate sunglasses, £425, by Kirk Originals

TO ILLUSTRATE QUITE HOW LOW-KEY THE PERSON I'm going to be writing about is, let me start by telling you about someone else. Let me tell you about Martin. Martin is the taxi driver the fates assign me at Dublin Airport when I arrive in Ireland the day before the interview with the person I'm going to be writing about. Once the car doors are closed, Martin wastes no time in indicating to me that he, like the person I'm going to be writing about, is a little bit famous. Unlike that person, Martin is not low-key.

"Google 'Dublin taxi-driver same-sex marriage'," he instructs me, as we careen southwards into the city. But I don't need to, because Martin's already telling me about the time in 2015 when he was asked by an Australian news channel for his views on the imminent referendum in Ireland, deciding whether to permit same-sex marriage. His response, described by the reporter as "trademark Irish humour", was this: "I'm in favour of same-sex marriage because I've been having the same sex with the wife for the last 30 years." It got "millions of views on YouTube", says Martin, but apparently his wife wasn't too happy. "It was actually 35 years," he admits. Classic Martin.

And what brings me to Dublin, Martin wants to know? Well, Martin, I'm interviewing an actor. Irish. Lives here.

"I'm a film buff," says Martin.

OK, then! Have a guess.

"Gabriel Byrne."

No.

"Brendan Gleeson."

No.

"Liam Neeson?"

Still no, but he's been in films with all thr–

"GOBSHIIIIITE!!" Martin yells out of the window at a woman crossing the road in front of his taxi, who scrambles back to the curb.

He's been in films with all three.

"Jonathan Rhys Meyers."

Nope.

"No, no! I've got it. Colin Farrell."

Nuh-uh.

"James McAvoy."

For fuck's sake, Martin, he's not even Irish.

A lightbulb above Martin's head flickers into life. "Aah, *Peaky Blinders*! Cillian Murphy!"

Bingo, Martin. That's your man.

It may not seem like it, but it is testament to how discreetly Cillian Murphy goes about his business that he is the seventh name on Martin's list of Irish (and one Scottish) actors. This despite having been in some of the most memorable films of the last two decades, including Danny Boyle's zombie apocalypse classic *28 Days Later* and Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy; turning in multiple acclaimed and gut-wrenching performances on stage; and starring in one of the most fanatically adored British TV shows of the current era, *Peaky Blinders*. Murphy is not an actor who seeks attention outside of his work — in fact, he responds to it like the jaywalking woman to Martin's front bumper — and his quiet resistance to the showiness of show business has enabled him to lie low. Thus far, at least: in February, Murphy will start filming Nolan's new biopic, *Oppenheimer*, which might well be the biggest role of his career.

The morning after my thrill-ride with Martin, I take a local train to the suburb where Murphy lives. The tracks run past glitzy tech-company headquarters, then modest residential streets, before the buildings fall away and we're skimming the shores of Dublin Bay. I get off in a leafy seaside neighbourhood made up of quietly expensive, elegant houses and a parade of single-storey shop-cum-cafes. It's in one of these that I've been instructed to meet him, though I spot him in the street outside and wave him down. He's dressed in dark colours, a cagoule over a striped T-shirt, dark jeans and boots, with his hair in the floppy style he seems to favour when the choice is his own; his sunglasses, which he quickly removes, are the only hint he's trying to be inconspicuous and, paradoxically, that he's famous.

"How do we do this?" he says, when we're face to face (which we are almost exactly; I'm 5ft 7in and he's about the same). I suggest we do an elbow tap and, as happens when you do an elbow tap, we look immediately ridiculous, like apprentice Morris dancers. Inside the cafe, we take a table in a room at the back.

Murphy has been living in this neighbourhood, which he refers to as "the poor man's Riviera", since 2015. After 14 years in London, he and his wife, Yvonne McGuinness, an artist, decided to come back to Ireland so their two sons, Malachy, now 16, and Aran, 14, could be raised here, closer to their grandparents and away from the "pressure of living in a massive city". There was also, at the time, the whiff of the Brexit referendum in the air. "It wasn't informed by that," he says, "but we felt like rats from a sinking ship, a little bit. Ha! It was the right time to come back."

"It's quiet," he says. "I like it, where I am now in life. Wouldn't have been that exciting in my twenties." His house doesn't exactly have an ocean view — "from the top of my son's bedroom if you stand on your tip-toes" — but, he says, "we're quite close, and it does make you feel instantly decompressed in some way. I think it's good for the old Happiness Index."

In person, Murphy exudes modesty, though even "exudes" might be too forceful a word. His voice is smooth and soothing, as listeners of *Cillian Murphy's Limited Edition*, his occasional show for BBC Radio 6 Music, will know; so, too, will users of the Calm meditation app, on which he reads a purposefully boring story about travelling by train across Ireland ("Limerick Junction has been a key turning point on the Irish rail network since it opened over 170 years ago…") that is supposed to lull you to sleep. (I can confirm that, if you're interviewing him the next day, it is less effective.)

Murphy is between projects when we meet and his regime during these fallow periods sounds enviable: reading, watching movies, listening to music. Every day, he goes for a walk or run with the family Labrador dog, Scout. He does it, he says, "more for my head now", though he used to run competitively. (I've interviewed him once before, a decade or so ago, and by chance the next day we were both running the same 10k. I had looked up his time afterwards and it was, like, 37 minutes. "It wasn't 37 minutes!" he says when I bring it up. "I've never done it in 37 minutes. No way." OK, fine, but I remember it was *fast*.)

Since lockdown, Yvonne has swum daily in the sea. Murphy has been known to venture out in a dinghy. In a low-key way, of course.

"If it was ever as part of a club, I wouldn't get involved."

Why not?

"Fucking sailing clubs! It wouldn't be my thing."

For months at a time, Murphy's life can be like this. Quiet. Restful. Serene. But, like the goddesss Persephone summering on Mount Olympus or an ice-cream van man wintering in Tenerife, it's only one side of the coin. Eventually, it's time to get back to work.

AS MARTIN WILL TELL YOU, if there's one thing he's done that has tipped Cillian Murphy into the public consciousness, it is *Peaky Blinders*, which is due to return for its sixth and final season in February. Created by the British screenwriter Steven Knight (*Taboo*, *Eastern Promises*), *Peaky*, as it is known to fans, is the phenomenally successful TV drama series about →

Opposite: grey suede blazer, £2,210, by Canali. Green cotton polo shirt, £60; blue cotton trousers, £50, both by Nine Crows Vintage

a criminal gang in Birmingham in the early 20th century and the upwardly mobile working-class family, the Shelbys, who run it. The show is sleek and violent and stylish, all three in the extreme: the lice-deterring haircut favoured by the Blinders — shaved sides, long on top — has become iconic in its own right. It is also, yes, sexy: characters don't walk down the street in *Peaky*; they strut in slo-mo, in the V-formation of migrating geese, to a twang of electric guitar.

At the centre of it all is Murphy's character, Tommy Shelby — or "Tommy fucking Shelby" as he is occasionally, and with considerable justification, introduced — the leader of the Peaky Blinders, who wears his razor-trimmed cap, from which the gang takes its name, low over his eyes and keeps his cards close to his chest. Tommy is the moral heart of the drama or, maybe, the moral vacuum: he runs gambling rackets, he smuggles drugs, he kills in cold blood. But he also defends the oppressed, would do anything for his kids, and is deeply damaged, like so many of the men around him, from fighting in WW1: can he help it if his compass is askew?

"Cillian and Tommy are almost polar opposites," Steven Knight tells me during a phone call, "and maybe that's how it works." Knight likes to tell the story of how, after his audition, aware his natural mien is not exactly gangsterish, Murphy followed up with a text reading, "Remember, I'm an actor." "Which I never forgot," says Knight. "And boy, what an actor."

From his first appearance as Tommy in the pilot episode, in an immaculate suit, riding a black horse through a Birmingham slum as children and women scramble for cover and the staccato opening chords of the show's theme song, "Red Right Hand" by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, begin to play, it was clear Murphy was right to back himself. "The haircut, the suits, dropping the voice, I used all of that," he says, matter-of-factly. "These are all just tricks that you figure out."

"It's a cliché, but no one else could have been Tommy Shelby," says Knight. "It would be absurd. It was as if Cillian was always waiting."

IN MARCH 2020, MURPHY WAS PREPARING TO FLY TO MANCHESTER to shoot the final season of *Peaky Blinders*. Pre-production was complete; the sets were built. Yet the first cases of Covid-19 in both England and Ireland had already been identified. There were rumours of lockdowns. Murphy and his co-star, Helen McCrory, who had also been in the series since the show began in 2013, playing Tommy's spunky Aunt Polly, were concerned.

"I do remember both myself and Helen calling the producers and saying, 'Guys, surely we can't do this?'" Murphy recalls. "They were saying, 'Well, we're still waiting to see.' And then, eventually, they called it."

Murphy found himself at home for 18 months. During that time, he "tried to moderate the wine intake just like everybody else", but largely got through it unscathed. "I feel bad saying it, but we had an OK lockdown. It was nice to be with the kids. There were a few explosions, but we got on mostly."

In January 2021, it was deemed safe to recommence filming in Manchester, but by then the circumstances were very different. The UK was still in lockdown and Murphy was required to shuttle only between the set and his rented flat. The memory is not a happy one. "It wasn't a very pleasant shooting experience," he says, "for loads of different reasons."

One reason overshadowed all the others. By the time filming began again, it had become apparent, though not publicly, that McCrory was suffering from breast cancer and would not be able to participate. The script would need to be revised and the character of Aunt Polly written out. On 16 April, midway through filming, the production got the news that McCrory had died. She was 52.

"We were just reeling throughout the whole thing," says Murphy, who still seems in a kind of shock. "She was a dear, dear pal and she was the beating heart of that show, so it felt very strange being on set without her. The difficult thing to comprehend is that, if it wasn't for Covid, there would be a whole other version of this show with Helen in it. But she was so private and so fucking brave and courageous.

"She was inspirational," he continues. "People throw that word around, but she genuinely was. Her values, the way she dealt with her kids and Damian [Lewis, the actor, and McCrory's husband of 14 years]…" He starts slipping in and out of the present tense. "She cares about everybody. She's really funny and really cool, and she had this real warmth. She really cared. It's just… I still can't believe she's not here. It doesn't make sense. I've never lost anyone like that — who was young and a friend. It was very confusing. But she was magnificent. She was an absolutely magnificent person."

In the depths of grief, the material provided no solace. "Dark as fuck" is how Murphy describes the show's sixth series, though he can't say much more about it. Both Knight and Murphy have talked in the past about the arc of the show leading towards Tommy's redemption; now, though, Murphy seems unsure. "I think that's what Steve was aiming for," he says, "with loads of wrong turns along the way. But I don't know. I'll leave that to the court of public opinion. I don't know if he's been redeemed."

So far, the court of public opinion has swayed quite heavily in Tommy's favour, to an extent even Murphy seems surprised by. "Duality is what I'm interested in, that thing of: how the fuck can he be such a sensitive, good father but commit this heinous fucking act? People are willing to spend an awful long time with characters who, if someone described them to you in daily life, you would say, 'Keep that person away from me.' Is it only in television that that exists?"

Maybe it's a TV thing, but maybe it's also a Murphy thing. Even playing a character as ethically suspect as Tommy, he seems to inspire in people a strange, protective urge. Steven Knight recalls an encounter at a *Peaky Blinders* Q&A in New York, which seems typical.

"A woman put up her hand and said, 'You won't hurt him, will you?' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'You won't hurt Tommy? You're not going to kill him or anything?' I said, 'I don't know.' She was really upset. This makes it sound like this was a mad person, but she was self-evidently sane and normal; she was just so worried his fate was in my hands. In the end, I said, 'I promise I won't kill him.'"

Knight has made it clear he intends to write a *Peaky Blinders* film, which, he tells me, "we're going to be making in the next 18 months to two years". Would it involve Cillian? "Yes," he says, resolutely. "That's all I can tell you."

When I mention talk of a film to Murphy, he's more circumspect.

"Mmm, talk," he says. "I'm open to ideas. I think he wants to, but I haven't read anything."

How, then, does he reflect on his time on *Peaky Blinders*? "I've loved it. It's only this year that it felt hard. I'm still shocked by how it went from this small little show on BBC Two to this worldwide phenomenon."

So as far as his contractual obligations go, this is the end? He concurs: "I'm free! Haha!"

I point out that he may never have to wear his hair in the Peaky crop again.

"Gladly never, yeah!" he says.

Unless the film happens.

"We'll see."

‘The difficult thing to comprehend is that, if it wasn’t for Covid, there would be a whole other version of Peaky Blinders with Helen in it’

WHILE THE WEATHER IS HOLDING, we decide to go for a walk. Murphy suggests heading for the harbour, where he likes to take Scout, up towards a small lighthouse from the base of which you get views across the Irish Sea. As we walk over a footbridge towards the pier, the clouds are rolling in off the water, but rolling past again just as quickly. “That’s why you get that nice light,” says Murphy.

The eldest of four children (two boys, two girls), Murphy grew up in Ballintemple, County Cork, to parents who were both teachers. Their house had “a lot of music, a lot of books”, though his parents weren’t particularly into theatre: a family outing was more likely to be to a traditional Irish music gig. He remembers being “reasonably troublesome” when he was young, “a bit of a mess, a bit energetic”, though he became more introverted as a teenager when, he says, “You fucking mute yourself, don’t you?” He found an outlet in music, playing lunchtime concerts for the first years at his conservative Catholic boys’ school in a “very Beatles-influenced” band called Sarahdaze, which evolved into another outfit called Sons of Mr Green Genes (by this point, they had discovered Frank Zappa).

Around the same time, aged 16, 17, he became aware of acting as a thing you could do when an esteemed local theatre group, Corcadorca, came to run a drama module at his school. “Me and my pal Bob, who was the drummer in the band, did all these funny sketches. Just messing and putting on voices and things. But it was eye-opening and it felt natural. I absolutely loved it.” In 1995, he saw Corcadorca’s production of *A Clockwork Orange*, which was staged at Sir Henry’s nightclub in Cork. “It was promenade, techno, dry ice and guys on stilts… I hadn’t seen a conventional play in a proscenium arch or anything. The first thing I saw was that. I thought it was the greatest thing I’d ever seen in my whole life.”

Green Genes, though, were taking off, with a style that was, let’s say, of its time. “We had a tune called ‘Didgeridon’t’,” Murphy remembers. “I wouldn’t listen to a didgeridoo tune now, but when you’re 20…” There’s archive news footage on YouTube that shows a young Murphy, sweaty-faced and wide-eyed, explaining his band’s ethos to the reporter: “It’s a music that’s popular in the ’90s and it’s not constrained by any formula, and that came from the whole spirit of jazz, which is the spirit to express yourself on your instrument, which has been lost…” (“Sounds like a blend of funk, rock and hip-hop to me!” says the reporter.)

In August of 1996, Sons of Mr Green Genes were offered a recording contract by Acid Jazz Records. As it happened, Murphy had just failed the first year of a law degree, for which he’d signed up somewhat reluctantly (“My parents thought it might be good…”), but his mother and father felt his brother, Páidi, who was also in the band but still at school, was too young. By then, Murphy had auditioned for Corcadorca’s new play, *Disco Pigs*, written by a young Irish playwright, Enda Walsh. He’d also met his future wife, Yvonne. While on a camping holiday in France, he found out he’d got the male lead in *Disco Pigs*: “They posted the script to my tent.” Green Genes turned the record contract down. It was, says Murphy, “a big month”.

Disco Pigs went on to be something of a phenomenon. The production travelled to the 1997 Edinburgh Festival, where it “didn’t so much debut”, wrote *The Guardian*, “as erupt”, before transferring to the Bush Theatre in London. Later, it went on international tour, during which Murphy was able to scratch the itch — “staying up late, drinking, going to nightclubs, playing live” — that he was missing from not being in the band. Gradually, though, his path was being set. “I remember, after London, I thought, ‘Right, I’m going to call myself an actor.’”

Murphy’s subsequent career as an actor… Wait. We’re walking along the pier now, and he’s seen someone he knows. A woman with another Labrador.

“Hiya!” he says. Then, when she’s out of earshot, “You know how you know all the dogs’ names, but not their owners’? There’s always a bit of a stand-off between my dog and that one. They’re both males, but one of them tries to have sex with the other.”

And, in those interactions, your dog…

“Mine generally gets mounted.”

Right. Where were we..? Murphy’s subsequent career as an actor has had some notable highs. There was *28 Days Later*, written by Alex Garland — and presumably transcribed from his crystal ball — in which a pandemic spreads across the world and causes the population to become rage-fuelled zombies. Murphy watched it with Malachy a few years ago: “I was pretty proud of how well it stood up. He loved it. He was really scared.”

There was Neil Jordan’s *Breakfast on Pluto* in 2005, in which Murphy starred as a transgender woman searching for her mother, for which Murphy was nominated for a Golden Globe.

There was Ken Loach’s *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* in 2006, about the Irish War of Independence, which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes and which Murphy describes as “the purest work I’ve ever done”. And there was Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* trilogy, released between 2005 and 2012, in which he played Dr Jonathan “Scarecrow” Crane.

Murphy’s relationship with Nolan is one of the most important of his career. Having first tried out as the Batman himself — again, there’s YouTube audition footage out there — he was instead given the role of the fine-boned baddie. He has also played the posh-boy mark whose brain is invaded in Nolan’s 2010 sci-fi heist movie *Inception*, and the “shivering soldier” (a bigger role than it sounds) in 2017’s *Dunkirk*. “Chris will just call you up,” says Murphy, of how the roles are assigned, “and I always say yes, because they’re always amazing.”

This year, Nolan called again. Word had already been circulating about a new $100m project, *Oppenheimer*: an adaption of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *American Prometheus*, by Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin, which recounts the troubled life of the theoretical physicist and “father of the atomic bomb”. This time, Nolan wasn’t thinking of a supporting role →

Blue cotton poplin peacoat, £3,000; black leather lace-up shoes, £750, both by Prada. Mulitcoloured printed vintage shirt, £40, by Diesel at Nine Crows Vintage.
White cotton T-shirt, £75, by Sunspel. Black wool trousers, £750, by Prada at MatchesFashion

‘I do get nervous, anxious and insecure, but then you go, “Fuck it. I have been doing it for 25 years. So just keep going”’

for Murphy: he wanted him for Robert J Oppenheimer himself.

Presumably, he didn’t have to mull that one over for long. “Oh my god, no!” says Murphy. “It’s the first time he’s cast me in a lead, which I’m still a bit in shock about, but I’m thrilled. It’s a huge part and a lot of work. But in my estimation, you’re working with one of the greatest living directors, so you’re in safe hands.”

As we walk round the lighthouse and make our way back down the pier, he says what he can about *Oppenheimer*, which, like all Nolan productions, means not a great deal. “The difference with this one is the story is there, everybody knows what happened. But Chris is telling it in a different way, as with Chris you would expect. That’s all I can say.” Is it focused on a particular period of his life? The Manhattan Project, perchance? “I’m not going to say. They’d kill me — they’re so strict!”

Murphy has already begun his research, which will be typically thorough. “There’s a wealth of stuff out there and I will read it all. I am never, ever going to understand quantum mechanics, no matter how hard or how many times people try to explain it to me. There’s 0.0001 per cent of the population on the planet who have the brainpower to understand that. But I can begin to understand, conceptually, what those guys were trying to do.”

It’s another role which, like Tommy Shelby, seems certain to be absorbing and difficult. Later in life, Oppenheimer was openly devastated about his involvement in creating a weapon of mass destruction that killed millions (he was also investigated by the FBI for left-wing leanings and had a tricky love life for good measure). But, as Murphy says when talking about being in *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, Enda Walsh’s 2019 stage adaptation of Max Porter’s novel about a bereaved husband, it’s a mode to which he can’t help but be drawn.

“I’ve always been interested in stuff that is — I don’t want to say on the darker side, because that’s too reductive — the melancholic, or the ambiguous, or the more transgressive. That, to me, is drama. That is where the real stuff is to be mined. I’m not interested in romantic comedies. I’m just not. In all the great films or literature or plays, they’re the things I’m interested in. That’s not to say they can’t be funny: Beckett is funny; Enda is very funny. But getting into those knotty, difficult, uncomfortable places — I really find that stimulating.”

Still, doesn’t a role like Oppenheimer, and a project of this magnitude, feel overwhelming? “It does feel immense and it feels terrifying,” he says, as we find ourselves back on the footbridge by the train station. “But if I felt it was easy, I wouldn’t be interested. I do get nervous, anxious and insecure, but then you go, ‘Fuck it. I have been doing it for 25 years and I have done it before. So just keep going.’”

Listening back to the recording later, I realise Murphy is quietly, politely pointing something out to me: that having humility is not the same thing as being out of your depth. I also realise later that, when I’d asked him how come he isn’t more, for lack of a better word, showbizzy, and he’d said, “I don’t know, I’ve never been interested in that stuff. I’ve always been interested in just the work. I’m shit at being anything else other than an actor. I’m shit at being a personality. I’m shit at red carpets. I’m shit at being on talk shows. I’m shit at, like, all the other stuff that comes with it,” that buried in there, he says he’s not shit at being an actor. He might not bang on about it, but Murphy knows his worth.

I had asked Stephen Knight if he thought Murphy’s demeanour means people underestimate him. “Maybe they did in the past,” Knight replied. “They don’t anymore.”

WE’RE AT THE STATION NOW and, though Murphy’s got business at home to attend to — “I’ll take the dog for a big long walk now, because he’ll be at home moaning” — he offers to wait with me for the next train back into the city. We head along the platform to a metal bench, but when we reach it, it’s wet. “Classic Ireland,” says Murphy, not unfondly.

The train’s not for a few minutes, so I ask Murphy how he feels about fame and the way nobody’s normal to you anymore. “It’s a bit weird,” he says. “My kids don’t like it. But it’s how you react to it and how you deal with it. You can deal with it one way or you can deal with it another way… We’ve got a lurker.”

Sure enough, there’s a group of lanky teenage boys on the platform, young men really, all in sportswear, taking the piss out of each other loudly, and one of them is edging closer. I ask Murphy what usually happens in this situation.

“Usually they’ll come up and take a photograph,” he says. “Or surreptitiously take a photograph. I really don’t like that. It’s like the fucking amateur Stasi.”

The man-boy lurker plucks up the courage to approach. Murphy greets him sunnily.

“Hi, man!”

“Are you Cillian Murphy?” says the man-boy (no misidentification there, Martin, take note).

“Yeah,” says Murphy.

“Oh, shit, that’s real cool actually. I saw you walking by and wasn’t sure. That’s real cool.”

“Nice to meet you,” Murphy says.

“You, too,” says the man-boy. “I love your show.”

“Thanks for watching it! The next series will be out in February.”

“February,” says the man-boy. “Nice.”

Murphy turns back to me. “Anything else?”

I scrabble through my notebook. We talk a bit about directors, and the fact that his kids are growing up faster than he’d like, but then my train arrives and, before I know it, I’m standing inside the open doors and we’re semaphoring our goodbyes. The man-boy has backed off, but not far.

“Nice to meet you!” says Murphy as the doors beep. When they’ve closed and the train has started to move, I realise I’m still holding my Dictaphone out to him, and I worry about those boys in the station who’ll be waiting, like a group of dogfish, for him to turn around. I find myself wanting to call out to them, “Don’t hurt him!” like that perfectly sane woman in New York. Then I remember that he’s Cillian fucking Murphy. He’ll be fine. ○

Peaky Blinders series six airs on BBC One in February; Oppenheimer is in cinemas 23 July 2023

Black linen shirt with white pearls, £770, by Bode at MatchesFashion. 1858 Geosphere UltraBlack Limited Edition watch, £5,600, by Montblanc

Opposite: yellow cotton striped polo shirt, £450, by Tod’s

Producer: Heron White | Production Assistant: Emily Cooper | Fashion Assistant: Violet Ogden |Photographer’s assistants: Maya Skelton; Miro Teplitzky | Grooming: Gareth Bromell @ Premier Hair and Makeup using Oxygenetix and Bumble & Bumble

LEWK

AGAIN

Opposite: painter Joshua Reynolds' 'Portrait of Charles Coote, 1st Earl of Bellamont (1738-1800), in Robes of the Order of the Bath', 1773–'74. This page: designer Harris Reed wears a look from his 2017 Fluid Romanticism collection, which will be exhibited at the V&A

A new show at the V&A in London considers men's fashion then and now, and what it tells us about shifting ideas of masculinity, from the classical to the contemporary

By Alex Bilmes

CHARLES COOTE WAS A ROGUE. IN THE WORDS OF ROSALIND MCKEVER, co-curator of an extensive and provocative new exhibition of men's fashion at the Victoria & Albert Museum, Coote, the first Earl of Bellamont, was "not a very nice man… which only adds to the irony of how he is viewed now". It's a verdict delivered by McKever with icy understatement and a pointedly raised eyebrow.

The potted biography offered by the National Gallery of Ireland, owner of the most famous portrait of Coote, is less euphemistic, more damning. "The Earl of Bellamont was a vain and pompous womaniser who deserted his wife… and in his will acknowledged six illegitimate children by four different mothers." Further shade is thrown by our own National Gallery: "His appointment as a Knight of the Bath in 1764, and his raising to an earl in 1767, had more to do with political expediency than any real achievement."

Maybe so. And yet, as immortalised in Joshua Reynolds' celebrated painting (1773-1774), which will travel from Dublin to London this spring for *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear*, this careless Georgian fop did have one redeeming feature, at least for those of us who care about such things: the Earl was quite the style icon. In fact, he might have made a peacock reconsider its dowdy plumage and decide, in consultation with its tailor, to go for something a bit more daring, next time.

In Reynolds' painting, Coote is shown leaning nonchalantly on his sword, his voluminous crimson cloak (now faded to pink) draped insouciantly over his shoulders as he gazes impassively into the middle distance, perhaps considering his next purchase on MatchesFashion. On his head sits the overblown, ostrich-feathered hat of the Order of the Bath. On his stockinged feet, ornate gold shoes with rosettes and, because rosettes are never enough on their own, spurs. It is, to use a phrase beloved of today's Insta-popular fashion plates, a serious lewk.

"It is so extraordinarily camp," says McKever of the Reynolds painting. We are looking at it, on a crisp November morning, projected onto a screen set up at one end of the splendid V&A boardroom, presided over by a portrait of Victoria herself, the sombre queen, in her widow's black, providing a stark contrast to Coote's outré stylings. "In Ireland, when the National Gallery has its Pride events," says McKever, "this is the picture they use."

Almost 250 years after his death, then, the roistering philanderer Coote lives on, but not in any way he could have imaged. Rather than the macho swordsman he and Reynolds might have hoped they were projecting, a vision of patriarchal power, the painting, when seen through 21st-century eyes, has made the Earl a symbol of gender fluidity, an unlikely LGBTQ+ standard-bearer, and an inspiration to a new generation of fashion designers. The National Gallery of Ireland again: "Coote's nonchalant stance and flamboyant robes present him, in a modern context, as a stereotypical camp gay man."

McKever, a specialist in European painting and sculpture, looked at the Reynolds portrait of Coote recently with the young London-based designer Harris Reed, whose swooningly romantic experiments in non-binary clothing are worn by the pop stars Harry Styles, Olly Alexander and Solange. They stood together, too, in front of another notable portrait of another sumptuously upholstered 18th-century clothes horse: Jean-Baptiste Perronneau's painting of Jacques Cazotte, author of *The Devil in Love*, winemaker, collector and counter-revolutionary, who lost his head to the guillotine in 1792. It is alongside the Perronneau that a striking pink ensemble by Reed, equally inspired by 18th-century courtiers and 1970s glam rock, will be displayed when the exhibition opens in March. That juxtaposition of new and old, image and object, will be repeated throughout the exhibition, which includes classical sculptures, Renaissance paintings, film and photography, plus clothes by designers including Giorgio Armani, Vivienne Westwood, Grace Wales Bonner, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Rick Owens, Craig Green, Raf Simons and Alessandro Michele for Gucci (the show's sponsor). All have been gathered to celebrate and stimulate debate around how men's clothes, and representations of them, have influenced and reflected notions of gender, and specifically how masculinity is performed and understood throughout history.

Coote and Cazotte, those scandalous popinjays, were captured by their portraitists towards the end of one of the greatest periods of masculine flamboyance, in dress and adornment, in Western history. In the decades to come, particularly in the aftermath of the French revolution, when — how best to put this? — the flouncy aristo vibe was considered totally cheugy, menswear would change dramatically. In the early 19th-century, Beau Brummell, the Regency dandy and the most influential men's stylist ever, streamlined and codified men's fashion into uniform, giving us the suit, still the defining expression of masculine fashion. Some might suggest menswear has never entirely recovered its avant-garde mojo — though Harris Reed, as well as the V&A curators, may beg to differ.

Most of us, even fashion people, or perhaps especially fashion people, think of menswear, especially formal menswear, as staid, buttoned-up, *boring* — especially when compared to the fantastic creations of womenswear designers. Why would the V&A want to dedicate an exhibition to it?

"Men's fashion is *fascinating*," says McKever's colleague, Claire Wilcox, the museum's senior fashion curator, and the person responsible for

A double-breasted peacoat worn with a cravat, plus hat, by Alessandro Michele for Gucci, autumn/winter 2015

Previous pages: Joshua Reynolds/© National Gallery of Ireland | Courtesy of Harris Reed/Giovanni Corabi | These pages: courtesy of Gucci | © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

multiple previous blockbusters including *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, and *Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up*. The V&A has had men's fashion exhibitions before, Wilcox says, although "never on the same scale as this. But the timing seems good. Not only is there a revival in interest, and not only is the menswear industry expanding hugely, and not only is it economically significant, but there has been a great resurgence of creativity in contemporary men's fashion."

The reasons for this, Wilcox suggests, are numerous. "I think fashion always responds to social change," she says. "Clothing reveals our hopes and aspirations, and also our vulnerabilities. Young designers now in particular are presenting new versions of masculinity. It could be helped by the internet; it could be the fact that the world is more connected, more global, so there's more opportunity for diversity."

Fashion, Wilcox and McKever concede, is cyclical. Menswear is subject to occasional paroxysms of ostentation, such as in the fab-and-groovy 1960s and the let-it-all-hang-out 1970s. These are typically followed by recidivist retreats to stiff propriety, as exemplified by the 1980s power suit. The shift from dressing-up-box costume to off-the-peg uniform and back again is repeated throughout history.

McKever: "What we're trying to latch on to is why is this [resurgence in flamboyance] happening now, when else has it happened, and what can we learn from those changes and shifts? We're asking, 'How is masculinity performed through clothes?'"

A double-breasted wool coat worn with a cravat, plus hat, from the United States, 1845–1853

"It's a big subject, menswear," says Wilcox. "And while we're covering centuries, we're not trying to do everything. It's not a survey show. What we're trying to do is to propose inquiry, to open up debate."

Fashioning Masculinity is divided into three discrete galleries: "Underdressed", "Overdressed" and "Redressed". The first explores the bodies beneath the garments, and how fashion has moulded, and been moulded by, changing tastes in the ideal masculine physique. "Exemplars of the perfect male body are present in all museums," says McKever, as we look at images of classical sculpture, in which the naked male form is often draped or wrapped in fabric. "But within that you get a range of idealised bodies, from the really overmuscled Hercules to the much more lithe Adonis."

"I think what we're saying," says Wilcox, "is that the body, as well as the clothing that goes on it, is subject to fashion." Anyone who has seen a personal trainer in skinny jeans knows she's on to something here. Happily, there is no such image, as far as I'm aware, in *Fashioning Masculinities*. Instead, visitors to the Underdressed space will be treated to depictions of the undressed male, from Michelangelo to Calvin Klein.

Overdressed is where, in a riot of colour and drama and velvet and silk, exhibition-goers will meet the luxury shoppers of eras past and present, from the Earl of Bellamont to the creations of current American menswear designer Thom Browne, Nigerian designer Orange Culture, and our own Priya Ahluwalia.

Redressed, a contrast in stark monochrome, takes on the legacy of Brummell: the suit, in all its variety, from Edwardian frock coats to Teddy boys, the Duke of Windsor's tartans to a recent Burberry design for Marcus Rashford, not excluding Marlene Dietrich in Anderson & Sheppard and Sam Smith in Hermès.

"The suit," Wilcox says, definitively, "is *not* boring. It is extraordinary in its variety. Adolf Loos said the suit was the ultimate modern garment. It is such a beautiful, flexible thing."

And men who wear suits, I am reassured, are not (not necessarily) boring men. Beau Brummell's dandyism, McKever says, had less to do with flamboyance than with "taking an interest".

If the dominant expression of masculinity throughout history, a conception of what it is to be a man as narrow as a Mod's lapel, has so often been about strength, power and frigid pragmatism, there has, too, always been a counternarrative of vulnerability, beauty and romance, and the display of these. "Sometimes the modes of expression are subtle," says McKever. "It might be the quality of the cloth, the shape, the buttons, the cuffs: those tiny details that you have to look for, but they are there."

Wilcox points to a description, in Ian Kelly's magisterial biography of Brummell, of the old rake's gloves. "They were made of pigskin so fine it was transparent, so you could see his fingers. There is also something so visceral about that. It's very physical."

From a discussion of the history of the suit we segue into the influence of military uniform on male dress then and now: the trench coat, the bomber jacket, the preponderance of navy in my own wardrobe. Perhaps not surprisingly, given I work for a men's style magazine, I could talk to Wilcox and McKever about this stuff all day.

"Fashion is restless, isn't it?" says Wilcox. "It's always moving on. Perhaps historically, menswear has not moved so fast as womenswear, but now it's accelerating."

This show provides as good an opportunity as any to try to keep up. ○

Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear, in partnership with Gucci, is at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 19 March – 6 November 2022; Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL; vam.ac.uk

Above: a 1923 portrait of British politician and socialite Philip Sassoon, by John Singer Sargent.
Opposite: musician Sam Smith, photographed in 2020, wears cotton-poplin tie-neck shirt by Hermès, black wool blazer and navy wool pinstripe trousers by Random Identities, silver signet ring and 'Love Goes' identity bracelet (engraved with Smith's handwriting) by Bunney, and vintage pearl-drop earring and gold and emerald brooch

John Singer Sargent/© Tate Images | Sam Smith photographed by Alasdair McLellan | Stylist: Ben Reardon | Styling assistant Niccolo Torelli | Hair: Anthony Turner | Make-up: Anne Sofie Costa | Photography assistants: Lex Kembery; Simon Mackinlay

Courtesy of The National Gallery of Ireland | Courtesy of Dolce & Gabbana

Opposite: a portrait of 15-year-old Alessandro Farnese, son of the Duke of Parma, by Sofonisba Anguissola (circa 1560).
Above: a Dolce & Gabbana look from autumn/winter 2012, showcasing the designers' interpretation of the 'tistera', a traditional Sicilian cape, in tricotine fabric and carded wool, embellished with gold filigree embroidery and enriched with floral motifs

By Tabitha Lasley

Her body was found at her home on Buffs L been strangled and placed, face down, in a her jewels. Her car had been stolen and du High Road. A few days later, a stocking mas in a phone box in Romiley, a village 50 mile was murdered. A divorced mother of one, of Chester. Perhaps inevitably, the case bec

Heswall is a small town on the Wirral Peninsula known for its high house prices and snobby locals. It is the sort of place people move to to raise their children. My cousins and I grew up here. Both sets of parents fled the managed decline of Liverpool for the relative gentility of Heswall shortly after getting married.

The town has changed since then. It used to be prosperous. Now, it looks slightly down-at-heel, full of charity shops and empty units. But the crime rates remain low and the local air of complacency is intact. People still talk about this murder. In a small town, a case like this touches everyone. I was only two when it happened, but I've remained obsessed with it all my adult life. There have been many times when I've mentioned it to other people from Heswall and they've replied, "*I'm* obsessed with that one, too."

Much of it is to do with Bolshaw herself. For the press, she was the perfect victim: a glamorous divorcée with a fascinating personal life. Reports from the time note she didn't "look her age". Photos show her to have the sort of handsome, high-cheekboned good looks that make age largely irrelevant. But it was words, not pictures, that really rang the tabloids' bell. Her 17 diaries, going back 15 years, were found at the scene. According to different reports, between 200 and 300 men were named in them. Breathlessly, the papers listed these presumed lovers: the oil-rig worker, the magician, the carpet fitter, the farmer, the solicitor, the Ugandan police officer, the captain in the Sultan of Oman's army.

Journalists wrote about Bolshaw's "high-class" lifestyle, her "luxury" home. In reality, her home was modest — a small bungalow on a tidy estate — and her circumstances slightly precarious. She was a divorcée with a 26-year-old son, Christopher. She divorced when he was a child, and had lived alone ever since. She worked in a series of genteel, low-paid jobs: a barmaid at

Below: a police officer stands outside the bungalow in Heswall, Merseyside, where Cynthia Bolshaw was murdered in 1983

Lane, Heswall, on 9 October 1983. She had bath of water. She was naked, apart from mped a few miles away, on the Chester sk holding more of her jewellery was found es away. Cynthia Bolshaw was 50 when she she worked at the Dior counter at Browns came known as the "Beauty in the Bath".

the Hotel Victoria; a receptionist at the Parkgate Hotel; a saleswoman at Browns. Yet her life, as the papers told it, was one long whirl of dinner dates and secret trysts. One article relates that her escorts "thought nothing of paying £45 for dinner for two at Craxton Wood Hotel". Another claimed that the police were trying to trace a "bespectacled man of substance".

Coverage verged on the prurient. The police tasked with trawling through the diaries were reportedly known as the "boyfriend squad". At one point, there were 85 officers working on the case. They took 1,500 statements and spoke to 64 men under caution. There is a great picture from the original investigation — one the *Liverpool Echo* ran again in 2019 to mark the 20th anniversary of the trial — that shows a fleet of frowning detectives, all trade-union facial hair and kipper ties, filing out of a briefing. In 1983, police released a photo-fit of the man they wanted to trace (mid-fifties, glasses, thin-lipped), who was spotted with Bolshaw in a Chester estate agents a few months before she died. Despite the resources thrown at it, the trail soon went cold. The only person charged that year was a woman who pleaded guilty to wasting police time after making bogus calls.

For me, Bolshaw has always been emblematic of a certain era, a very specific brand of boom-time glamour: *Howards' Way*; Campari ads; unregulated money. She seems lifted straight from the pages of an airport novel. I can picture her very clearly: driving her little red car down Leighton Road, taking the corner too quickly, almost skidding on a pile of wet leaves. Icy 1980s soul on the radio: *Hangin' on a String* by Loose Ends, *Forget Me Nots* by Patrice Rushen.

Of course, we're used to treating murdered women as main characters now. The true crime genre has been rehabilitated. In her essay collection *Dead Girls*, Alice Bolin writes that old detective shows used the "victim's body [as] →

a neutral arena on which to work out male problems". By contrast, the new true crime moves victims upfront and centre. Where once there were Dead Girls, bodies whose personhood evaporated on contact with forensics, there are now Dead Women, dimensional and loved. Netflix docuseries *The Ripper* zeroes in on police incompetence in Yorkshire during the 1970s: their insistence on classifying victims as either "innocents" or "prostitutes" stymied their progress for years. Michelle McNamara's book *I'll Be Gone in the Dark: One Woman's Obsessive Search for the Golden State Killer* relates the screenwriter's titular hunt and traces her obsession back to its source: the moment 14-year-old McNamara found a murdered woman's Walkman on the side of the road. *My Favorite Murder*, meanwhile, is less of a podcast than a movement. The female hosts pore over cold cases, but also give their largely female fanbase pithy advice on staying safe. (Pro tip: Fuck politeness.)

My interest in the Bolshaw case predates this vogue for true crime. It feels more personal. It's partly to do with my family — they were loosely connected to the case — and partly to do with myself. The murder nags at the writerly bit of my brain: the section that gets snagged on a subject and won't let go until I've neutralised it in print. Even as a small child, I was like this. My cousins were faddy, flitting from one enthusiasm to the next. Their bedrooms were shrines to junked hobbies: musical instruments, mountain bikes, games consoles, skateboards. My focus was always more stubborn, my fixations harder to kick.

At the time of the murder, they lived on an unmade road called Field Way, about a quarter of a mile from Buffs Lane. My auntie, Irene Williams, remembers two police officers coming to her door one evening. One asked questions and took notes. The other just watched her, presumably observing her body language. She told them her husband Tom had sold Bolshaw her bungalow. He and his partner, Colin Wynne Evans, owned a local construction company. At this point, she said, the officers exchanged a look. Later, my uncle was interviewed by the police. I was quite grown up before I realised this was as a witness rather than a suspect.

Colin Wynne Evans ended up being a material witness at the trial. His statement — the only document that Liverpool Crown Court made available — provides a rambling account of his six-month affair with Bolshaw, whom he calls "red hot" (an assessment widely quoted in the press). According to him, the affair ended amicably when he stopped calling. She soon moved on to another married man, an ex-marine, whose wife threw a glass of whisky in her face when she learned of the affair. She later contracted Evans to do some work on her bungalow.

I'm not sure why this was included in evidence, though it does offer a rare glimpse into her emotional life. Too often, reports reduced Bolshaw to an archetype: the noirish femme fatale, a woman no better than she ought to be. The story had a fairytale quality, both in its imagery — the beauty suspended in water, like the princess in a glass coffin — and its rather sour sense of instruction.

As early as 1984, police working the case were comparing it to fiction. When appealing for fresh information, Detective Superintendent Jim Owens said, "In 24 years in the CID, I have never come across a more intriguing case. Agatha Christie could have written it." Once again, a call was put out for the elusive "man of substance" to come forward. He never did.

For the press, Cynthia Bolshaw was the perfect victim: a glamorous divorcée with a fascinating personal life

Over the next 15 years, the police would periodically appeal for new leads. In 1990, a £3,000 reward was put up. The case featured on BBC's *Crimewatch*. The people of Heswall continued to gossip and posit their own theories. She was a madam, who ran a vice ring from her billet at Browns; that's why she had all those men's numbers. She was a romantic, with an overactive imagination; these interactions were innocent, if they'd happened at all.

The case might have stayed unsolved had it not been for a woman called Barbara Cragg. After her divorce, she alleged to a friend that her ex-husband, John Taft, had asked her to give him an alibi for the night of the murder. He said he'd been at Bolshaw's bungalow that weekend, doing some work. This was only half-true. He had been with Bolshaw, but they were having an affair. In the event of things, he didn't need an alibi. In 1983, he told the police he'd never met Bolshaw and they accepted this. But in 1999, the investigation was reopened, and Cragg's friend went to the police. By then, advances in DNA technology meant they could test a semen sample found on Bolshaw's black negligée. Taft came back a match.

In November 1999, he was tried at Liverpool Crown Court for Bolshaw's murder. He was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. He has always maintained his innocence.

WHEN WE WERE TEENAGERS, MY COUSINS AND I USED TO COMPLAIN how boring Heswall was. Yet, somehow, we've all ended up back here. Contrary to popular belief, you can go home again. Though it's never quite the same.

I used to have a whole other life, in London. One day, I packed it up, like it was a touring show I was taking on the road, and left. I moved to Aberdeen for six months to interview offshore oil workers. Then I moved home to write a book about them. When I first got back, the men and their stories felt more vivid, more real, than the people around me. I talked about them constantly, inserting them into conversation, like a dumped girl trying to shoehorn in a mention of her ex. But as time went on, I stopped talking about them so much and then I began to forget them. Aberdeen started to feel like a fever dream, a sojourn I'd concocted during a dark night of the soul.

By then, I'd forgotten everything I hated about London, too. I couldn't remember why I'd left. It sometimes felt as if I'd dismantled my life in a fit of aggravated boredom, like Alan Partridge with the Corby trouser press. Except there was no concierge to put it back together.

I spent most of that first year back in Heswall Library. I sat and transcribed the interviews, hours and hours of talk, until the men's voices merged into one and their words became meaningless. I heard things I hadn't caught the first time: elisions and pauses; lies gestating beneath the surface of their conversation.

One day, I found my teenage diary pushed to the back of a drawer. It was one of those

five-year journals, with a few lines given over to each day. Initially, I'd followed the rubric, recording details of homework completed, practice tests aced, in tiny, ant-like script. I soon gave up. My days weren't worth recording. I came back to it when I was about 14. This time, I decided to flout the pages' schema, filling the remaining space with hectic, forward-leaning scrawl, screeds of arbitrary capitals, little cartoons.

The general impression, when taking the diary as a whole, was of a Pooterish superego, underpinned by a roiling id. Entries would begin with a quick debrief, catching my putative reader up on recent events, like a recap sequence on a soap opera. And there was an operatic quality to the content: treacherous friends, unfeeling parents, my Becky Sharpish scheming, as I rose through the ranks at school. Interspersed with all of this: boys. Boys, boys, boys.

Back then, boys were agents of social leverage. Bagging a good one could expedite your progress up the pecking order. I basically went out with boys to impress other girls. But does this ever really change? There is still a weird prestige attached to being a wife; women feel they've come down in the world when they get divorced, even if they were treated badly in the marriage.

I noticed my own status slip when I returned home single for the first time in years. Members of my family talked over me or just ignored the things I said. I was infantilised by my situation. My contribution to the conversation was worth only as much as a child's.

A single woman over a certain age remains an affront to convention, especially in a small, provincial town. In *The Lonely City*, writer Olivia Laing pinpoints 35 as "the age at which female aloneness is no longer socially sanctioned and carries with it a persistent whiff of strangeness, deviance and failure". Bolshaw must have been an oddity in that particular time and place: a woman of 50, already divorced for 20 years, who did not marry again but instead seemed content with her roster of lovers.

At trial, her friend Valerie Johnson Hamer said Bolshaw was "getting sadder" and regretted not settling down for a second time. I wonder if this was really true. Every single woman has her bad days. It is hard, in a society constructed for couples, to differentiate between what you want and what you're told to want.

Just before the first lockdown, I go to Liverpool to meet Maria Breslin, now editor of the *Liverpool Echo*. I want to get a clearer picture of Bolshaw from someone with first-hand knowledge of the case. In 1999, then a reporter for the Press Association, Breslin covered John Taft's trial and coined the name "the Beauty in the Bath". Before that, the case went by a more clinical moniker: "the Body in the Bath".

We meet in a coffee shop a few doors down from the *Echo*'s offices. A small, forceful woman in severely buttoned black, Breslin looks a bit like Björk, if Björk were cast in a dour Northern police procedural. She tells me the press "fell in love" with Bolshaw: "They painted a really good, vivid image of her. You really *liked* her."

At trial, Taft's defence tried to deploy Bolshaw's diaries. They lamented her "flawed" approach to men and the "risks" that her lifestyle entailed. But 1999 was not 1983. The prosecution had already prepared the jury for these revelations, reminding them that she lived the life of an "attractive single woman" who "enjoyed the company of men". The court heard that she sunbathed in her garden in a black G-string; that she'd had sex on the floor of a restaurant after closing; that she'd seduced an officer on Crewe's fraud squad by asking: "Well? Are you going to or not?" and later gave him a photo of herself naked on a rug.

In witness testimonies, Bolshaw came across as vital and dynamic: a woman in love with life. By contrast, Taft seemed unnaturally colourless. The director of a double-glazing company, he'd also lived in Heswall, but on the wrong side of the tracks, both literally and figuratively. His house was on Mostyn Avenue, a quiet cul-de-sac that runs between the marsh and the Wirral Way, a former railway line. Recently married to his second wife, Susan, he had no criminal record.

"He didn't *seem* like a killer," Breslin says. "I thought there was enough reasonable doubt not to convict him."

Breslin was sure Taft was going to get off. The Crown's timeline didn't add up. There were rumours the crime scene had been tampered with. One of the first officers on the scene let the bathwater out. It was said that Bolshaw was involved with someone high up in the force; people wondered if the two things were connected. Of course, the police had different protocols in 1983. They didn't treat crime scenes with the care they do now. It could have been simple negligence.

The prosecution offered no motive. They proposed that Taft went to Bolshaw's bungalow where they had consensual sex. Afterwards, he strangled her, for reasons unknown, placed her body in the bath, then stole her car, dumping it on the Chester High Road, before scrambling down an embankment to get onto the Wirral Way and walking home, weighed down by the stolen jewellery. A witness saw him digging in his garden before midnight. The Crown suggested he was burying the clothes he wore to kill Bolshaw. There was a hung jury: 10 to two. Taft's team was preparing for a retrial. At the last moment, a guilty verdict came in.

If a trial is test of two competing narratives, then the verdict is a resolution, the sentence an epilogue. But for a story to provide closure, it has to make sense. The defence might have framed their argument in prudish terms, but they had a point. Most murdered women are killed by men they know. If a woman is involved with multiple men, the number of suspects goes up. Why were the police so sure it was Taft?

I FINISH MY BOOK, EVENTUALLY. MY STOCK GOES BACK UP. My family stops talking over me. Selling the book feels like a personal vindication. This choice, at least, was correct.

In the autumn, my sister and I start running together. We run slowly, turning decorous circles around quiet estates, our brows cooled by the November drizzle.

My sister doesn't believe in running alone. She cites the names of murdered women, snatched off the street by strangers. I argue that, if she lets these men curtail her activities, she has allowed them to win.

Men are dangerous. Women must coexist with the threat. In Aberdeen, I had to master my fear of them. I learnt to listen to my instincts, to walk away from the ones I felt presented a risk. I believe all women have this ability, but it's a skill we have to relearn, like swimming. Then again, maybe I was just lucky. Maybe I'm attributing my luck to some flawless inner system that doesn't really exist.

On reading details of a murder, every woman asks herself the same questions. When did the victim know she was going to die? At what point did she realise that she had fatally misjudged this man? We run through these scenarios in our heads for the same talismanic reasons we consume true crime. If we rehearse a killer's MO, if we've learned to read the signs, then maybe we can outstrip death.

My sister and I run down Buffs Lane, past Bolshaw's bungalow. The estate looks like Pleasantville; little white houses and trim lawns. So much of this case feels transplanted from the screen. Sixteen years passed between the crime and the trial: one year shy of the narrative lag in *True Detective*. There are diaries used in evidence and a first wife who exacts vengeance on her →

faithless ex (*Gone Girl*). There is the leafy setting, the sense of dark deeds festering at the heart of suburbia (*Blue Velvet*). There is the body in the water, the suggestion of foul play and corruption from on high (*Twin Peaks*). Perhaps this is why it remains lodged in local memory when more recent crimes have been forgotten.

My attempts to research the case have been subject to another genre trope: the brick wall. I fill out numberless Freedom of Information requests, all of which are refused. I contact the Crown Prosecution Service and the Criminal Cases Review Commission. No one will speak to me, not even off the record. Bolshaw's son Christopher does not respond to my requests for comment. Neither does Detective John Parry, the only officer I manage to trace through the National Association of Retired Police Officers. Only one of Taft's defence team gets back to me: he remembers the case as a "cliff-hanger" but can't say much as he's still bound by legal privilege. I write to the Woolgatherers of Heswall, a drama troupe Taft allegedly joined. They remember no one of that name. I contact the witness who said she saw Taft digging in the garden; she rebuffs me in the strongest terms (she has since died). I find Bolshaw's sister living five minutes from me. It was she who found Bolshaw's body. I leave a message with her carer. She does not return the call.

A strange protocol of silence swirls around Bolshaw. People in Heswall are happy to speculate off the record, but few will give me a quote. I suspect it is because they know less than they are letting on. The more I learn about this case, the less I trust their recollections. They just repeat rumour as fact.

I decide to try Burton, a nearby village where Bolshaw lived for 15 years before moving to Heswall in 1983. The first three contacts on my list are dead. The Reeds, her next-door neighbours, have moved to Cheshire. I walk round to Bolshaw's old bungalow, Perrywood. It is freshly demolished. The material evidence of this story is vanishing, one building at a time. So many of Bolshaw's old haunts have gone now: the Hotel Victoria; the Parkgate Hotel; Browns of Chester.

I drive to Cheshire, in a mood of gloomy resignation. I am faintly surprised to find Colin and Sue Reed, Bolshaw's former neighbours, in their garden, tending to their tomato plants. They usher me into their kitchen, bickering gently in the way of long-married couples. They never went to Cynthia's bungalow in Heswall. Oh hang on, yes they did, they went once. She wasn't a flirtatious person. Well, she was a bit. She flirted with Sue's father. He was quite impressed!

The Reeds lived next door to Bolshaw for 15 years. They say she was a good friend and neighbour and that she was misrepresented in the media. Colin complained to the *Mail* about how she'd been portrayed and received an apology.

"The press started publishing things about her being a loose woman," he says. "She wasn't."

"She did have quite a few boyfriends," says Sue. "But then, why not?"

"Nothing unusual. She was a young lady at the time. Attractive."

"She would flirt, she was good-looking. And she was fun!"

The police, they say, were useless. They never saw the same officer twice. They only found out about the murder when a journalist called to get a quote.

As for the diaries, they were more like address books. Colin describes them as "an early Filofax". They listed the contact details of friends, neighbours and tradesmen.

I ask if Bolshaw had a history of bad relationships. Colin shakes his head.

"No! She wasn't scared of anything."

"She was lonely," says Sue. "I think she trusted people too much. I think men could have taken advantage of her and she wouldn't have stopped them."

They tell me that she had two long-term boyfriends. One was a married vet from Chester, who bought her a white car but had no intention of leaving his wife. She was with him for 10 years, on and off. The other was a customs officer who took her to Dubai. Both affairs were over by the time she moved to Heswall.

I ask Sue what the vet looked like.

"Tall," she says. "Very handsome."

What about the customs officer? She thinks for a moment.

"Dark," she says. "And dumpy."

I ponder this as I drive back up the motorway. Dumpy could be a word for fat. If you were trying to sound polite, if you were formalising the description for use in, say, a police memo, could you substitute the word "substantial"?

I realise what it is about this verdict that has been bothering me. It subverts what I know about male violence. If women use the murders of other women to plot their own decisions, then this one doesn't fit the blueprint. Male violence is tied to notions of possession. The greater ownership a man feels over a woman, the more likely he is to hurt her. This is why abuse usually steps up when a couple commits: once they have moved in together, or the woman becomes pregnant.

Taft and Bolshaw were not a committed couple. Their affair was casual. Though she was spotted with the "man of substance", looking at bungalows in Chester, in the weeks before she died. Maybe she'd started a more serious relationship? Or rekindled an old one?

THERE IS STILL ONE PERSON I NEED TO TALK TO, but I've been putting it off. My sister agrees to come with me and wait in the car. All the way there, she makes doomy prognostications about how the morning will pan out. I'll come to a sticky end. She'll come to a sticky end. Perhaps we will both come to sticky ends.

I am scared, too. I've never door-stepped a convicted killer before. I'm not that kind of journalist. I don't know what the protocol is. Should I act bullish and brazen it out? Or should I be apologetic? I'm leaning towards apologetic, because I'm starting to think Taft didn't do it.

He looks defeated when I tell him my business. His shoulders slump, his smile sags. As it turns out, I am not the first journalist to turn up on his doorstep.

"But I'm different," I wheedle, like a thwarted suitor. "I wrote a book!"

Taft gives me a long look. He has already been in a book: Dr Sandra Lean's *No Smoke*.

Dr Lean is a criminologist who believes he is innocent — not that this makes much difference. It is very difficult to overturn a conviction. The system is designed to protect them. Otherwise, courts would be clogged with appeals.

Taft maintained his innocence, so didn't get parole. He was released on tariff after 12 years. As far as he knows, he was the first male lifer to be let out on tariff while maintaining his innocence.

He does not want to let me into his house. He explains that his wife has been ill. He doesn't look in rude health himself. He is smaller than I expected; his clothes hang off him. Or maybe it's just that, because he's loomed so large in my thoughts these past few months, his corporeal presence is an anti-climax, like a celebrity's. He shrugs when I say I thought he'd be harder to find. There was no reason to move. His neighbours have always been kind. He's lucky, he says. He's had a lot of support.

Taft and I go on to exchange a few emails. He answers all of my questions about the case. Curiously, the only questions he won't answer are the ones I'd class as housekeeping: whether

he was in the Woolgatherers; whether he'd had a job tending graves.

I ask why he thinks he was released on tariff. He says many of the prison staff believed he was innocent. He tells me his story never changed inside because he didn't have to remember lies. He was relying on his memory.

"Think about it," he writes. "Apparently, I lived as a model citizen for 33 years, committed a horrendous murder, lived another 16 years as a model citizen and then a further 12 years as a model prisoner! Is that really the pattern of a violent man?"

Later, he sends me a diagram of the route the prosecution said he took, after dumping Bolshaw's car. In the interests of research, I walk it. It is a distance of eight miles and takes two hours. I am walking in broad daylight, though. Taft would have been stumbling along in the dark.

In order for him to be digging in his garden before midnight, as his neighbour claimed, he would need to have killed Bolshaw and stolen her car before 10pm. But another witness put Bolshaw's car on her drive at 11.30pm. The prosecution didn't acknowledge this contradiction. The judge did, though: he proposed a new timeline in his summing up. He suggested that Taft killed Bolshaw, went home, buried his clothes, then went back to Buffs Lane to steal her car, before dumping it on the Chester High Road and walking home, weighed down by stolen jewellery. Which would be feasible — just about — except that the prosecution claimed brown fibres found on Bolshaw's bed, on the stocking mask found in the Romiley phone box and the driver's seat of her car came from Taft's clothes. Clothes he'd allegedly buried in the garden. What are we to make of this? That Taft buried the clothes he wore to murder Bolshaw before exhuming them, putting them back on and returning to the scene of the crime?

There is also a question mark over when, exactly, Bolshaw died. The first officers at the scene and the doctor who pronounced death, who arrived at around 10.45am, found the bathwater still tepid, which suggests it was in the early hours of 9 October. This was the conclusion two pathologists came to in 1983. By 1999, one of them was dead; the other couldn't remember deciding a time. He accepted the prosecution's timeline, which saw her killed on the 8th.

An eyewitness in 1983 saw a man by the abandoned car at around 4.30am. By 1999, he couldn't remember what this man looked like, only that he'd seen him. His original statement describes a man in his mid-fifties with dark, curly hair, glasses and a Crombie coat. He doesn't sound like Taft, who was then a slight, blond man in his thirties who didn't wear glasses. He *does* sound quite a lot like the bespectacled "man of substance".

MY AUNTIE HAS MOVED HOUSE SEVERAL TIMES SINCE THE MURDER. Now, she is almost back to where she started: a quarter of a mile from Buffs Lane, but in the other direction.

She throws a party for my cousin's daughter. We sit in her kitchen, drinking beer and eating sausage rolls. Her latest house is open plan, each room giving onto the next, enfilade-style. The children hare round in circles, like actors in a Whitehall farce.

"I met John Taft the other day," I say.

Bolshaw's red Toyota was stolen after she was murdered. It was dumped a few miles away on the Chester High Road

My family put down their drinks and stare.

"What was he like?" says my cousin.

"Well," I say. "He doesn't *seem* like a killer."

What does a killer seem like? In theory, anyone can kill. But I know what Breslin meant. I once met a man who confessed to murder. He was one of the interviewees in my book. Our conversation was friendly, though I could sense the coiled potential in him, the possibility that he might snap. Taft did not project the same energy. I stopped being scared the moment he opened the door.

At one point, he told me that he was talking to me only as "damage limitation". It occurred to me then that a person convicted of murder remains under a kind of house arrest all his life. A journalist turns up at his door, and he has to be polite. He can't lose his temper; that looks aggressive. He can't really refuse to cooperate. That looks like he has something to hide.

Taft is constrained by his position, as I am freed by mine. In *Giving Up The Ghost*, Hilary Mantel writes that money has a sanctifying effect. Odd behaviour seems less odd once you've got an agent and "professionalised the whole thing". I have a commission. I am just doing my job. What would I be, without it? A person knocking on strangers' doors, trying to wake the dead.

When I started this piece, I assumed the police had got their man. Now, I'm not so sure. I certainly don't think the Crown proved Taft's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. There are too many problems with the case.

And while I can't claim to know a huge amount about our judicial system, I do know about men. On this point, I have to agree with Taft: a history of violence will repeat itself. The man who hurts one woman will usually go on to hurt more. The belief he has the right to kill a disobliging woman will lie at the very bedrock of his character. To a certain extent, it will inform his dealings will all women.

This is the most miserable corollary of an unsafe murder conviction. Not that an innocent man might lose a portion of his life. But that a guilty one will go free. And will remain free, to kill again.

MY COUSIN SUGGESTS I GO AND PUT SOME FLOWERS on Bolshaw's grave. I walk to the church. It is just past Field Way, the unmade road where my auntie used to live. The paths are cracked, the muddy ground at their margins baked into brittle ridges. They are making hay in the last field. The cut grass is ankle-deep. The graveyard looks wild, untenanted. Some of the headstones are listing to one side. They're wrapped in black and yellow tape, like the incident tape that people string across their doors at Halloween. A sexton stands in the corner, poking at a small bonfire. He brings me a jar of water. I prop the bouquet up at an angle. Someone has been there recently and left a small succulent. Her sister, perhaps, or someone acting for her.

Her headstone is in the shape of an open book. It gives the date of death as 9 October. This doesn't mean anything, though; they take the date of death from the doctor's confirmation. The epitaph is still visible beneath a cladding of lichen.

"In fondest memory of a dearly loved mother," it says. "Forever in our hearts." ○

Purple wool-silk gilet, £1,480; multicoloured nylon tracksuit jacket, £2,700; purple wool-cotton trousers, £880; black calf-leather trainers, £960

Pink wool-silk-cotton jacket, £1,660; pink merino-wool turtleneck jumper, £740; pink wool-cotton trousers, £880, all by LOUIS VUITTON

BRIGHT SPARKS

Spring/summer menswear lights up

Photographs by Jesse Laitinen
Fashion by Way Perry

Pink wool jacket, £2,590; pink wool trousers, £1,100; white cotton-canvas shoes, £540

Blue wool jacket, £1,990; blue wool trousers, £640; white leather trainers, £490, all by ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

Mojave cotton-linen jacket, £1,675; multicoloured cashmere-silk-cotton-linen sweater, £2,140; beige linen chinos, £830, all by LORO PIANA

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

Multicoloured silk jacket, £8,600; multicoloured viscose-cotton-silk vest, £1,630; green/red dotted cotton shirt, £800; black mohair wool trousers, £810, all by GUCCI

Sand cotton blazer, £350; sand cotton shirt, £120; sand cotton trousers, £190; brown suede loafers, £170; white cotton socks, £12, all by BOSS

Opposite: green suede jacket, £2,490, by CANALI

Off-white cotton twill beanie hat, £320; off-white cotton twill polo shirt, £900; white cotton trousers, £900

Grey mohair-wool cardigan, £1,350; white cotton shirt, £630; white cotton trousers, £900

Olive wool twill jacket, £2,350; grey silk twill shirt, £1,600; grey cotton-cashmere fleece sweatpants, £990, all by DIOR

Opposite: black/white checked cotton coat, £1,000; blue cotton-jersey top, £POA; black/white checked cotton shorts, £350; blue cotton socks, £20, all by PAUL SMITH. Black leather derby shoes, £750, by CHURCH'S

Yellow calf-skin parka jacket, £8,015; white cotton T-shirt, £265; white linen-wool trousers, £785, brown leather sandals, £POA

Orange technical poplin trench coat, £2,005; red knitted cotton shirt, £665; matching shorts, £720, all by SALVATORE FERRAGAMO

Pink/blue cashmere cardigan, £2,190; white cotton T-shirt, £355; beige cotton trousers, £620

Yellow linen-canvas blouson, £2,950; dark green cotton-drill trousers, £1,150, all by HERMÈS

Brown/blue printed wool vest, £320; white/black poplin shirt, £280; orange cotton trousers, £380; black recycled satin lace-ups, £495, all by VIVIENNE WESTWOOD

Blue viscose-jacquard waistcoat, £1,100; blue silk shirt, £650; grey linen-silk trousers, £880

Multicoloured linen-jacquard waistcoat, £1,100; matching trousers, £1,700, all by GIORGIO ARMANI

PAST
DECORATED ROOM

Opposite: multicoloured nylon trench coat, £1,980; white/yellow linen trousers, £1,490; blue leather-plexiglass bag, £3,300

Multicoloured wool knit, £750; multicoloured linen shorts, £1,490; yellow leather-plexiglass bag, £3,300, all by FENDI

Sand linen jacket, £330, by OLIVER SPENCER

Blue shawl tuxedo jacket, £3,260; blue cotton shirt, £720; navy blue silk-satin bow tie, £190; blue shawl tuxedo trousers, £1,150, all by BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

Blue mixed-fabric jacket, £2,150; blue mixed-fabric shirt, £950; blue mixed-fabric trousers, £750

Black mixed-fabric jacket, £2,250; black poplin shirt, £375; black wool trousers, £625; silver mixed-fabric/sequin lace-ups, £1,700

Gold sequin jacket, £2,600; orange cotton shirt, £850; gold sequin trousers, £1,100, all by DOLCE & GABBANA

Navy wool jacket, £2,600; navy wool pinstripe trousers, £1,350, both by PRADA. Brown leather sandals, £690, by CHURCH'S

Multicoloured nylon bucket hat, £720; navy/red wool pinstripe jacket, £2,600; beige wool check trousers, £1,350, all by PRADA

Photographer's assistants: George Nicolaides; Nick Radley | Fashion assistant: Craig Andrew James | Grooming: Bjorn Krischker using Susanne Kaufmann and Gents of London | Models: Zhang @ Premier Model Management; Malick Darbo @ Wilhelmina; Makito Uchida @ Supa Model Management | Producer: Lucy Hannon | Production assistant: Katie Meehan

IN
THE

AFTER 40 YEARS ON THE ROAD, NO ONE FEELS A ROOM LIKE CARL COX

BY ED CAESAR

PORTRAIT BY CHRIS FLOYD

MIX

CARL COX WAITED FOR HIS TIME. IT WAS SHORTLY BEFORE ONE-THIRTY on a Saturday morning in late September. Wearing a black T-shirt, black-framed glasses, and black jeans, he stood at the side of the stage in the Mayfield Depot in Manchester — a vast, disused rail terminal in the heart of the city that has become a thrilling entertainment venue, and the home of The Warehouse Project club nights. Cox listened as Peggy Gou, the penultimate DJ, finished her set. Out of Cox's eyeline rolled a sea of ravers who were, on aggregate, wasted. Nearly 10,000 people had streamed through the depot's giant doors that evening. Now, with 90 minutes before closing time, more than half that number pressed together to watch whatever Cox was about to do.

Some DJs know exactly what they are going to play, but Cox is not a planner. His method is anti-method. He likes to "feel the room" in the hours and minutes before he begins. He'll have records on his mind: new stuff, old stuff, maybe an idea of how to finish. Certain sequences are at hand, should the set go one way or another. But, until he has taken the temperature of a crowd, he cannot say for sure what medicine he should prescribe them. The process, as he described it to me, sounded quasi-shamanic.

What, I wondered, did Cox feel in this room? The worst strictures of the pandemic had only recently loosened. The novelty of a mask-free night out with thousands of strangers remained fresh. Sweat dripped from the girders and plastic crunched underfoot. Dazed and forlorn people wandered at the back of hall, as if they'd lost their mothers. Young men with muscles were stripped to the waist. Women in lurid cycling shorts, sports bras, and angular sunglasses held hands in the middle of the crowd, emitting radiant smiles. One guy, pressed against the front railings, looked as if he'd like to drive a tank through a prison wall. The atmosphere was friendly, but tending towards feral.

Cox hugged Gou when she finished her set, and beamed his gap-toothed smile. Roadies wheeled on his rig: turntables, laptop, mixer. There was, momentarily, no sound from the giant walls of speakers. Cox stood behind his decks, said something loud and indecipherable into the microphone, and began to play a heady brew. Locomotive bass was spliced with rave-y synthesiser chords, and a vocal sample that I later discovered was from "Old School" — a track on 2Pac's *Me Against the World* album. The crowd, responding both to Cox's celebrity and to the music itself, went bananas.

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE COX PLAYED THE WAREHOUSE, he and I spent a couple of hours together in a recording studio in the incongruously twee setting of a Cheshire market town. We could have spent a couple of days. Cox is 59 years old. He's a vivid, fast, candid talker, with hundreds of stories from four decades of working in dance music, and he laughs with his whole body. He is also a one-man rebuttal to the idea that DJs are not artists because they play other people's records. Listen to Cox describe his deep love and encyclopaedic knowledge of dozens of genres, his legerdemain for blending disparate moments in the history of electronic music, his dazzling ability to discern what a crowd might need at any given moment, and his way of introducing a sound so that — in his words — "it plasters you to the bloody wall" and leaves you in no doubt: he is no mere projectionist, he's the movie.

Cox's mother and father came to England from Barbados. She was a midwife, and he worked on the buses. Cox grew up in Carshalton, in south London, with his two sisters. (Cox now lives between houses in Melbourne and Brighton, but his vowels have never left the south circular.) There weren't many other black families in Carshalton in the 1960s and '70s. Cox remembers being racially abused as a child. He wasn't particularly hurt by the name-calling, and he recalls that it reflected the atmosphere at the time: an active National Front; Eddie Booth on *Love Thy Neighbour* calling black people "Sambos". He left school as soon as he could.

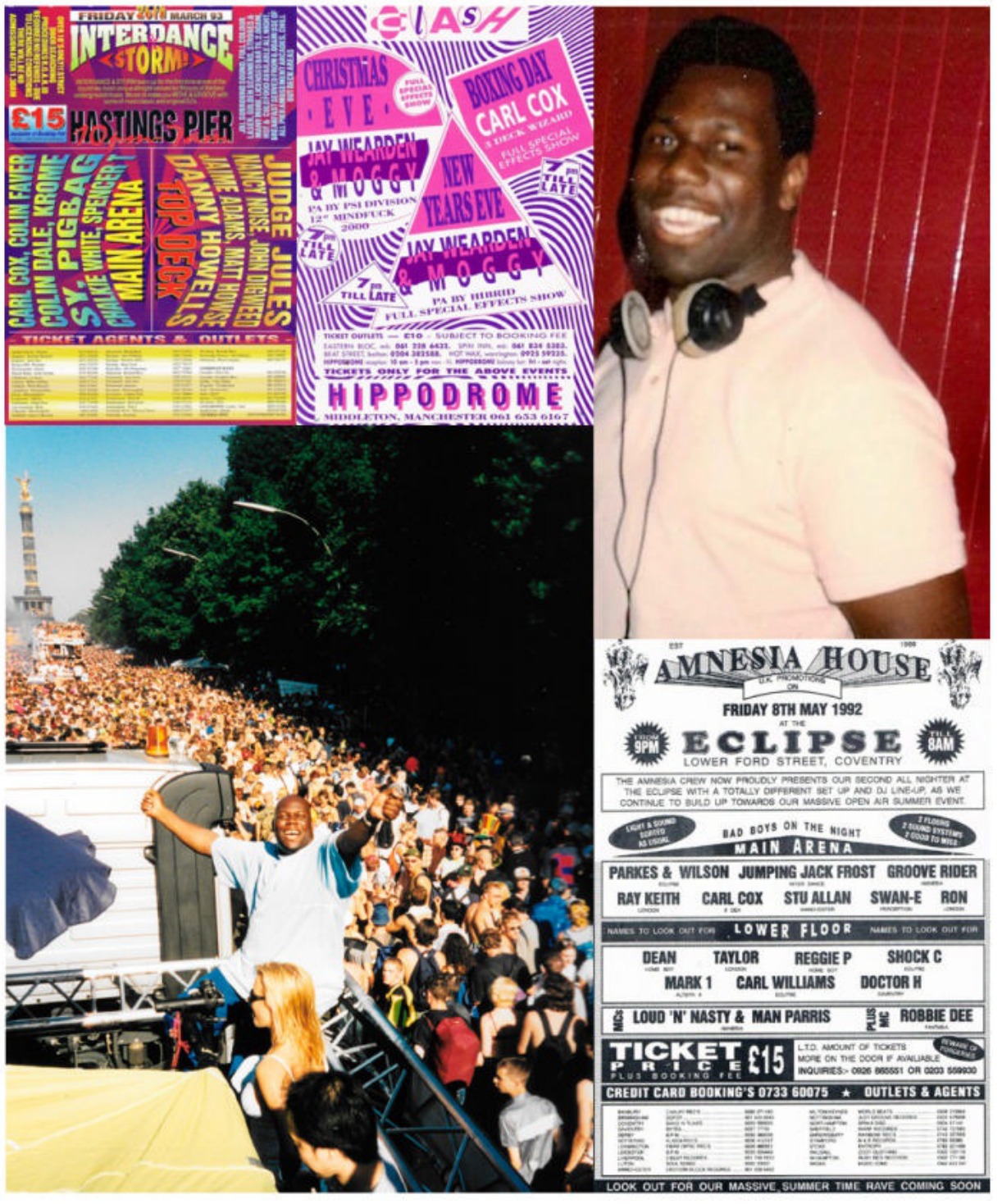
Opposite, clockwise from top left: rave flyers for 1993's Interdance & Storm, and Clash's 1991 end-of-year parties, both featuring Carl Cox; the DJ in his younger years; a 1992 poster for Coventry's Amnesia House, also starring Cox; the Three-Deck Wizard at Berlin's Love Parade, 1998

Music lit him up. His parents owned a collection of Soul 45s. Aretha Franklin was a favourite. Cox loved playing them at family parties. He brought a turntable and a speaker into primary school and spun his dad's 45s for his friends at lunchtime. At 10, when he started getting pocket money, he spent it at the record shop. He supported his vinyl habit by working every odd job he could: cutting grass, decorating, whatever. By 14 — he was a big teen — he was sneaking into nightclubs, where it used to drive him crazy that the DJs talked over the music. By 16, he owned his own mobile disco, mostly playing funk and soul, but he made money as a scaffolder and painter. At 17, he was sent to prison for joyriding. He spent his 18th birthday serving a short sentence at HM Prison Blantyre House in Kent.

Many of these details are included in Cox's autobiography, *Oh yes, oh yes!*. It's not a dazzling work of literature, but, reading it, I realised how little I knew of Cox's story. (Superstar DJs occupy a strange position: you may have listened to them thousands of times, and recognise their faces instantly, but most are not celebrities in the traditional sense, and their lives are not public property.) The book's description of the period that followed Cox's spell in prison until the birth of acid house in the late 1980s is thrilling. To compress a complicated story: Cox was both witness to and participant in the dance-music explosion of the time. He always wanted to DJ, but felt he had to work harder for his opportunities than white kids. Cox told me he was the victim of racism, both conscious and unconscious: "If there was a white person and a black person going for a job at a club, the white person would get it — and it wouldn't be because they were better than me... Their face fit a narrative."

Cox decided to make himself indispensable. He graduated from his mobile disco and bought a nightclub-ready sound system of his own, which he hired out to other DJs. In the mid-1980s, Cox's equipment was in high demand. Soon, he met

'A CROWD WANTS TO BE FED. SO, IT'S MAYBE FIVE PER CENT WHAT THEY KNOW, 10 PER CENT CLASSICS, AND THE REST IS ALL NEW...'



DJs like Nicky Holloway, Danny Rampling, Johnny Walker, and Paul Oakenfold. These four would go on a "lads' holiday" to Ibiza in 1987, and return — having experienced ecstasy, and nights at Amnesia with the Argentinian DJ Alfredo — as evangelists for a new sound called "Balearic" house music. Cox was invited on that holiday, but couldn't afford the plane fare. He experienced the Balearic moment in London, when he was invited to play at the new club nights that emerged in the wake of the Ibiza epiphany: Project, and Shoom. Cox remembers Alfredo being invited to DJ at Project in Streatham. Cox was in a crowd of glassy-eyed fellow believers that night, and thought "it was like watching the future unfold in front of my eyes".

Cox, by now living in Brighton, launched himself headlong into the chaos that followed: illegal raves, dodging the police, annoying suburban England. He was still primarily known for his sound system, but he found more and more work as a DJ. In the late 1980s, he was, in his words, "the warm-up to the warm-up" on most bills, but he began to find an audience in the post-club rave nights that began at three or four in the morning on the south coast. At about 10am at a rave called "A Midsummer Night's Dream", in front of a crowd of flagging dancers, he became the first DJ to use three decks simultaneously. He played two copies of "French Kiss" by Lil Louis and mixed them in with Doug Lazy's "Let it Roll". The sound, as Cox recalls, was "fatter than I had imagined it", and reinvigorated the crowd as if with a cattle-prod. His girlfriend and manager at the time handed out his business card to promoters who were listening. Cox became known as the "Three-Deck Wizard", and his stock rose vertiginously.

IN THE WAREHOUSE, COX WAS NEARLY AN HOUR INTO HIS SET, lolling to the beat in trademark fashion, swapping his weight from foot to foot. The venue was still packed. I walked downstairs from the stage, into the crowd. Out of nowhere came a loop of a song that caused a rush of memories. A female vocalist delivered the same line over and over, "every… wakes up early". It was followed by a familiar burst of piano chords. I soon located the memory, and the sample. It was from "Gypsy Woman (She's Homeless)" by Crystal Waters, a song that had been popular in 1991. (The lovely refrain: "She's just like you and me, but she's homeless.") Later, I discovered that "Gypsy Woman" had been reworked in 2020 by an outfit called Mr Belt & Wezol. It was that version that Cox was playing. I looked around me. Most of the people in the room weren't alive in 1991. And yet they still greeted the chords of "Gypsy Woman" like an old friend.

When we met, Cox said he wasn't in the business of only playing classics. Any resident DJ at any club could do that. He saw his job as a showcase for new music. Producers and artists sent him tracks, and he tested them at live events. The Warehouse was one of his first live shows since the beginning of the pandemic, and he had, in his words, "18 months of music that hasn't seen the dancefloor, that is bloody awesome." For his 90-minute set at the Warehouse, he had, he thought, 10 hours' worth of possible music to play, which the public had never encountered.

"If people are dancing to something they've never heard before, that's an *experience*," Cox said. "A crowd wants to be fed. So, it's maybe five per cent what they know, 10 per cent classics, and the rest is all new…"

Listen to enough Carl Cox sets, and you notice not just this division of fresh and worn, unseen and seen, but also the sheer variety of the music he plays. In many people's heads, Cox is a techno DJ. (Techno, in the simplest terms, is harder and slightly faster than house, with four strong beats in a bar, and often no vocals.) Cox told me, "I'll always fly the flag for techno, real underground techno", but his tastes are oceanic. His favourite album is *Songs in the Key of Life* by Stevie Wonder. He sometimes likes to play calypso. Kraftwerk knock him over.

Between 2001 and 2016, Carl Cox had a weekly residency at Space, the now-shuttered Ibiza nightclub. Perhaps the best example of Cox's catholic approach is the final set he ever played at Space. He DJ-ed for nine hours straight, without pause, and concluded with "The End" by The Doors. If you have the time, watch the set on YouTube. It's the record of a master at work, and a profoundly impressive display of skill and fortitude — not to mention bladder control — for a big man in his mid-fifties. Cox was shaking and →

Courtesy of Carl Cox | Robert Kritsch | Philipp Straub | Stefania Fiorendi
Colpa Press from the publication 'UK Rave Flyers 1991-1996'

close to tears when he brought the music down. He knew that something was ending that could not be replaced. Cox says he will never assume another residency in Ibiza. The island has changed. There are too many VIP tables, too much segregation based on wealth. There are still Ibizan clubs he loves, which hew to a more egalitarian spirit, and where he would happily play one-off gigs. But Space had its own magic: "It was just about the floor, and how you interact with people; didn't matter if you was a billionaire, or you was a fisherman."

I asked Cox about the final set at Space, and what it meant to him.

"That night, I moved through a journey of music," he told me. "It had nothing to do with techno. It was everything about a DJ playing a selection of music for that evening. If I'd played techno for nine hours..." Here, he begins to shake with laughter; I suggest people's hearts might have exploded. "Yeah! I mean, it would have been insular, it would have been selfish to do that. I love sharing my love of music. So whatever moves me, hopefully moves you."

COX IS WELL PAID. THE WAREHOUSE PROJECT WOULD NOT SHARE DETAILS of their arrangement with Cox, but others who work in the live-music business suggested that his fee might have been £50,000 for the 90-minute set. Cox's name sells tickets, and the Warehouse had many tickets to sell. The pandemic had nixed Cox's live shows for 18 months, but he continued to produce music in his studio in Melbourne, where he spends much of his time. Moreover, now that the world was re-opening, he had opportunities to make large sums of money playing live sets to huge crowds, seemingly as often as he needed to.

When I spoke to Cox, however, I was struck by what his career had cost him. In *Oh yes, oh yes!*, he alludes to the life of a travelling DJ in the late 1980s and early '90s being "not great for the relationship" with his girlfriend at the time. But other than that, his private life is a closed book. When we met, he told me

'Space was just about the floor, and how you interact with people; didn't matter if you was a billionaire or a fisherman': Cox during his now-legendary nine-hour set for the Ibizan venue's 'Closing Fiesta', 20 September 2016

'I CAN DELIVER THE BEST MUSIC YOU'LL HEAR FROM AN INDIVIDUAL. THAT'S BEEN MY CALLING. I'M LIKE A TECHNO-EVANGELIST, SPREADING THE LOVE'

that he'd been married once, and that the marriage had ended more than 25 years earlier, and that he'd been "nearly-married twice after that". Relationships were hard, and his lifestyle was partly to blame.

"My wife — that was my girl," he says. "There wasn't anyone else. But she felt like a spare part in my world. It was really playing on her mind." Had he ever wanted children? "I wanted to find the right person to have kids with, and I didn't want to be a father who was always buggering off every two minutes… But then, time's passing."

I sensed a note of regret, but Cox said he felt none. "I think I've come to a point in my life where I thought, 'If I've been put on Earth in the way that I was, then this is what I wanted to become'. I can deliver you the best music you'll hear from an individual. That's been my calling." He laughs, aware that he sounds pompous. But he's serious. "I'm like a techno-evangelist, spreading the love of the kick-drum to the world."

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1999, COX PLAYED TWICE. The first show was in Sydney, where he saw the new millennium in. He then boarded a plane, and flew back to 1999, where he played another set in Hawaii. His life is full of such incidents. He DJ-ed to around a million people at Love Parade in Berlin, in 1998. (A million people!) Cox recounts such tales with a winning baffle-ment. ("I never thought I'd hit the high-high heights, honestly.") But it's not these achievements that feature most prominently in his retelling.

If you ask Cox which moments have been most meaningful to him, he will tell you about the small clubs he's played, the dense hours when the dancers and the DJs were matched as perfectly as the records — nights that were unrecordable, because you were either there, or you weren't. He'll tell you about Womb, a 1,000-person-capacity club in Tokyo, where he shared a bill with the American DJ Seth Troxler, and about how the music was full of riot and variety. Troxler played Prince, "and loads of weird and wonderful things… Amazing, great night. Great club. Proper underground."

Cox is nearly old enough for his free bus pass. Most of his contemporaries have stopped playing live shows, but Cox's schedule remains manic. He now gets exhausted by the travel. When he contracted Covid recently, it knocked him out for a month. He's also got many other interests, including a motorsport team that he owns and loves. He could quite easily just stay in his studio and make new music, never play another gig, and live handsomely. And yet, he's still on the road. When I ask him why, he talks about Womb, the feeling that he had after the show, and his regret that there were too many clubs to play, and not enough time.

"I didn't go back to Womb for five years after that night," Cox said. "Five years! So if I don't do these events now, I don't know when I'll ever do them."

There were 10 minutes left at the Warehouse. Barring a few exceptions, the ravers in the crowd had kept their phones in their pockets. It wasn't a set that lent itself to video capture. The music was too propulsive. People were just trying to keep up. But shortly before 3am, the old man behind the decks introduced "Born Slippy", by Underworld — the track that *Trainspotting* made famous. I have heard those opening chords thousands of times, but they have lost none of their power. Cox was perspiring heavily and singing along. The crowd was bathed in a blood-red light. A hundred camera flashes now shone above swaying heads. When the drums entered, Cox punched both of his hands forward into the air.

The beat was both a strike and its measure; the kick and its bruise. The thuds arrived faster than twice a second. Each one marked time, and advanced it. The ravers were closer to the moment when they'd disperse into a cold night, and the dread of the following morning. Cox was closer to the moment when he'd receive their acclaim, wipe sweat from his forehead, then slip off to a car, and a hotel bed, and an aeroplane, and more shows in the days to come. Who knew when he'd be back? *So many things to see and do*, went the song. ○

THE MAJOR DONOR

FICTION

BY WILL SELF

ILLUSTRATION BY MRZYK & MORICEAU

FICTION

NOW IT'S ALL, SO TO SPEAK, COME OUT... well, there's a sort of exhausted hunger for the truth — or, at any rate, that cataloguing of the bare facts which nowadays takes the place of any deeper, collectively felt and enjoined sincerity. We want to know everything about what's occurred... and nothing concerning why; while perhaps being dimly aware that we've always known both. If you like, this is really only an intensified form of the mentality in any small and fairly remote town — a community of such a size that a sizeable minority of those you see in the streets are known to you by name, while a significant majority are by sight. Known, that is, in the ordinary rather than the Biblical sense.

Not that we're a godless lot — plenty among us are believers, and while you might've expected the revelations following his death to fall most heavily upon them, their religion does seem to provide some succour. Why wouldn't it? Who begat whom, the Family of Man — the very Trinity itself with its blurring of the concupiscent and the connubial... all these notions, together with a supervening ethic of passive acceptance at least allow them to find succour with one another; whereas those of us who've drifted a little apart from the community, like me, well... such alienation now seems like a weird forerunner of this far greater and more deeply existential repulsion. I realise it's specious to distinguish between this and that feature, but for me the disgust — and the sense of being shadowed that shadows it — seem congealed in my own skin.

Last thing at night, bringing cupped hands to my face and drenching it — the water falls away and I'm left fixated by this harmless freckle or that innocent whitehead; and for seconds then minutes, until I manage to snap out of it, I pick at the offending blemish, seeing it as the leading edge of some sticky tape that, should I succeed in getting under, will come away quite smoothly — bringing with it the rest of my rotten skin.

Let's, in the first instance, talk about him. All things having been different, it would've been possible to write a perfectly laudatory and perfectly dull account of him: an obituary, lengthy quotations from which could also be used for the inevitable article in the local paper; one illustrated with a photograph of him at this ceremony or that occasion, his legs grey and columnar, his hair a slightly lopsided grey helmet, his face a complacent beige blur. He had, by dint of sheer hard work and a certain native canniness — for he'd come from below, with no formal schooling — risen to become a pillar of the local community: an elected councillor for decades, a three-time serving mayor, a prominent local businessman, and consequently chairman of the chamber of commerce.

He had, it's true, no time for organised labour, which he viewed as the legalisation of mob rule — but he remembered his childhood, and always exhibited true compassion, both in individual cases and collectively through his beneficence. Many are the tales told of this young widow, or that old one, who, facing destitution, was amazed to discover their store bills or their rent settled, or a lump sum deposited at the local bank from which an annuity was to be paid to them henceforth and forever.

As for the donations he made to the entire community — well, no one familiar with our pretty little town can fail to be impressed by its air of well-set elegance and harmony. It was he who campaigned for the necessary building codes, so that even in the poorer neighbourhoods the house fronts and apartment block facades still retain a proportionality and regularity pleasing to the eye. And it was he who endowed the central library and the small liberal arts college. He who gave land for the new city centre park; he who paid for almost all of the new diagnostic centre at the hospital, and of course, he, personally, who organised and ran the football training sessions.

There's a small bronze plaque on the wall of the clubhouse featuring a bas-relief of him — and there's a full-length oil painting of him in pride of place in the council chamber; a bust of him in porphyry looks down from a niche onto the reference section in the library, while the two central foci of the park's landscaping are a bandstand for summer concerts and a greater than life-size statue that shows him at his most informal, wearing his old gardening corduroys, seated on a bench, and with his beloved Birman,

Genghis, curled up in his lap. But even if it weren't for these very real presences — which, while confirming his now-permanent absence, nonetheless bring his familiar features back insistently to us — his appearance would nonetheless be ever before us in the very constitution of our material reality: his activities have been that substantial.

Of course, the how-he-did-it is all anyone cares about now — but speaking for myself alone, once the truth came out it seemed to me it'd been hiding in plain view all along, and whatever outrage the townsfolk expressed, really, they were angry with themselves for their own complacency. In this, too, they were confirmed as his rightful heirs — for hadn't he been equally complacent: making no secret of where he was going and when, of who his brother was and which clinic he ran. Nor, when the troubles had begun — some said because of certain toxins his own factory had released into the river upstream of the town — did he dissimulate: he was a functionalist — as was his brother. So if anyone wasn't able for whatever reason, to conceive, he saw no reason why the clinic — which was in a small town uncannily like our own, at once deceptively close and confusingly far away — shouldn't give them all the helping hands they needed.

This was the wherefore — it tells us nothing of the why. And we want to know why, the way any children demand of their parents an impossible depth of comprehension: demand of they who're responsible for our own genesis an explanation of the origin of life, the universe, and everything within it. Of course, for the older townspeople there's a different sort of questioning — one that interrogates not just their complacency but their active complicity with the major donor. Such a clashing of horns! After all, it's they who looked first into our pudgy features and saw there his distinctive ones — or else watched them emerge, like Polaroid photographs of him that took years then decades to develop.

That quite so many of the townsmen should turn out to be impotent — and quite a few of the women, barren — was bizarre, certainly, but far more perplexing was their unwillingness to discuss it either severally, vis-à-vis, or even to soliloquise on the matter as they strolled beneath the lindens along Central Boulevard. Yes, yes — there was the quite banal equation many of them made between motility and manhood, but this isn't sufficient to explain their maintenance of strict sub rosa unto the third and now fourth generations. I said above that ours was a town of a size such that a casual stroller through its leafy streets and flowery lanes might well know a substantial minority of passers-by by name and a majority by sight — but quite obviously, his situation was different because he knew.

Walking around town, he would frequently stop to talk to this or that acquaintance — some merely glancing ones, others he'd encountered, acknowledged and engaged with perhaps a thousand times, yet never in all these years got beyond the stage of basic pleasantries: the weather for the time of year, the encroachments of the nearby city in the form of new and crassly commercial retail premises, and the tinge of smog in our once pristine heavens. And in between these briefer halts there were shorter ones still — mere checks in the flow of his progress, to tip his hat to a lady, lower one eyelid to a boy, touch his brim with his index finger in acknowledgement of a man who, perhaps years before, had delivered coal or cabbages to his house, and yet whom he had nevertheless never forgotten. If he stopped to chat for a minute or two perhaps 50 times during his constitutional, these checks constituted 10 times as many such recognitions — for as he talked with one, he would acknowledge so many others who were passing by.

On Mondays his orbit took him — with stops at one or two shops and offices — in a neat parabola to the house of his mistress, Madame Paloma, whose apartments occupied the first two storeys of an elaborate Carpenter-Gothic house on Cedar Avenue, the most conspicuous feature of which is a large jardin d'hiver, facing out over an overgrown garden. It was here that she entertained him with Vermouth and her body. The liaison was public knowledge — accepted, more or less, although there were, naturally enough, darker rumours that their relationship was illegitimate for more than one reason.

→

On Tuesdays he walked in the opposite direction: through Feldman Park, along Hünsruck Boulevard and around the Sports Centre — not just the once, but seven times anticlockwise, his own version of the Muslims' *tawaf*, or circumambulation of the Kaaba at Mecca. After that, he would drift through the streets of artisans' cottages to Mrs Pilbrow's café where he would spend at least an hour over his strudel and coffee. As on Mondays, his progress was punctuated by numerous encounters: a chat with a newspaper seller that went beyond mere convention to consider the real basis of facticity and how it could be known — or a mock duel with schoolboys using the papers themselves. Children, for obvious reasons, always detained him — and while with any other of the town's shiftless male population such intercourse would have attracted criticism and even outright censure, with him no one minded. Indeed, mothers would often offer their children to him, saying "Walk with him for a while, for he has given us all so much." And he would return the compliment along with the child, saying on the doorstep of this humble home or that grand one: "I feel so very close to them, y'know…"

On Wednesdays he visited his tailor to be measured for new clothes, and his dentist to have work done on his — admittedly appalling — teeth. In both cases, affinity made of business a sort of conjugal pleasure. Later, his tailor said of him: "I scarcely had to make any measurements at all — I knew his proportions as I know my own, so could cut him a new suit as if I were slicing bread." While as for his dentist, despite the awful caries and gingivitis affecting him, he never required any anaesthetic: "It was as if I could feel the position of his nerves through gum-flesh, dendrite and enamel, and so was able to avoid them… An uncanny sensation — and not one I ever experienced with any other patient."

On Thursdays he walked down Main Street, stopping still more frequently than usual — chatting, or at least exchanging greetings, with as many as a hundred folk, before he reached his own office, where he would stay for several hours to transact business, speaking quite informally with managers and other employees alike. After that, he'd return to his house — which he shared only with his eldest acknowledged son, and of course, Genghis. On Fridays he received any number of petitioners at his home — and was punctilious in hearing them all out, even if it took until the small hours. And then, on Saturday, he would mount the step and enter the passenger compartment of his vintage Silver Wraith limousine to be driven to his brother's establishment in that town which is at once neighbouring and curiously distant, to make his weekly deposits.

And on Sundays, he went to church to bow his head before the one authority manifestly greater than himself — and who, seeing him at these times (at least in his later years), could not be moved by the vulnerability of his balding and liver-spotted pate, and the gentle shaking of his hands, sheathed in wrinkled gloves made from old man's skin, as they clutched his prayer book.

IF I DESCANT ON HIS QUOTIDIAN LIFE, IT'S ONLY BECAUSE MY OWN POSITION MADE IT SO MUCH EASIER for me to understand what he was up to than anyone else. When did I know? It's hard to say — but certainly by puberty… In point of fact, when I come to consider the matter properly, puberty and my awareness of the situation were effectively the same phenomenon. As I matured, I understood — and if I emphasise the extent, frequency and intensity of his daily encounters — because, as he aged, all agreed even a brief chat with him felt almost revelatory. It's only because his strolling persona exemplified a phenomenon all of us townspeople began to feel as the decades passed: without daring to acknowledge the underlying reality — such was the strength of our denial, both individually and collectively — we all experienced this general thickening of social fluidity, such that even when alone we could feel the impress of the others on our skin, together with the tacky residue of their gregariousness. We were becoming fish who knew about water.

A chance meeting with an acquaintance would take a little longer to conclude — before either party could consult a timepiece and say "Must get on…" they'd be joined by a third who was scarcely known

to either of them, then quite possibly a fourth yet more distal. Larger gatherings might become impromptu parties — and parties convened in the public parks readily became riotous, such were the numbers not of gatecrashers, but impromptu invitees. This tendency of the townspeople to fuse rather than fission was predicated on the slow inversion of that axiom of interconnectedness hitherto set out: in the last few years before he died, we all began to realise that we now knew at least a majority of the town's inhabitants by name — and pretty well all of them by sight. This explains, I suppose, why we couldn't help striking up spontaneous conversations with each other, or indulging in surprise convocations.

You might've thought the narcissism of small differences would've thrust us asunder quite as much as resemblance acted centripetally upon us (to such an extent that on Saturdays, the open-air market in the town square frequently became a strange sight, as almost the entire population was sucked into a sort of vortex, tightly packed, revolving about one another like so many musk oxen, overwintering in the high Arctic), but this wasn't so. It's true that siblings can be viscerally repelled by one another quite as much as they're attracted — which is why, no doubt, so many family occasions crackle with magnetism — but in this very unusual case, only one parent was widely shared: the major donor. The major donor, whose benefactions of all sorts ended abruptly with his own death. There was a will to be read, naturally — he had been a consummate homme d'affaires — and all were invited to hear it declaimed, shakily, over the public address system outside the town hall by his personal lawyer — a man even older than himself, whose demeanour convinced all who heard him that he could not have been aware of its contents before, in plain view of all of us, the seal of the envelope containing the baleful legacy was broken.

And as he croaked the truth, the townspeople turned to one another, searching each other's faces at first — then stepping back to regard one another stepping back, for we are by no means fools and know that gait is quite as much an indicator of heredity as facial features, or blood and DNA tests for that matter. There have been a lot of the latter now, and Madame Paloma — who's the only one who'll still have anything to do with me — tells me the results have been fully calibrated and incorporated into an app, such that now when any two townspeople meet up they can immediately discover their degree of consanguinity: are they half-siblings, full (there are a few), nephews or nieces and uncles or aunts? And of course, their degree of non-consanguinity as well: perhaps never in the history of the world have so many people lost their biological parents so rapidly without there being a commensurate loss of life.

All told, some 93 per cent of the town's population turned out to be his direct descendants — and as the lawyer croaked on, and the realisation gripped them they grew restive. Still, if only he'd at least tried to explain why he'd done it they just might have taken it better. There was this — and there was also the further vexation of the financial element of his legacy (everything, including his businesses, his rental incomes, his chattels and his other assets had been left to me), without which I don't think they'd have become quite so ugly, quite so quickly. As his only acknowledged son, and the eldest, it was reasonable for my multitudinous siblings to assume this: that I was the favourite — and we all know what happens to the child so honoured, once the older generation has gone: the others turn on the one they feel has deprived them of their parent's love and subject him to compensatory hatred.

So they chased me from the precincts of the town hall all the way home — along Main Street and down Chestnut Avenue, through Feldman Park and along Hünsruck Boulevard; around the Sports Centre and up the overgrown alley that runs behind the house I'd grown up in, motherless but perfectly secure.

I haven't had a day's peace or security since then: my brothers and sisters in the police force aren't that conscientious when it comes to patrolling my perimeter — and there are always others of my siblings out there, screaming abuse at me, as if I weren't suffering quite as much as them. From time to time a flung stone will break another windowpane and I'll clutch Genghis yet tighter. The poor thing hasn't got a clue what's going on. ○

WILL SELF

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN MCALISTER

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7

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4. CDLP, £128 5. ON @ MR PORTER, £70 6. LULULEMON, £48 7. DISTRICT VISION @ MATCHESFASHION, £125

171

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MR MARVIS,
£69

adidas

The FWD-01 offers 16 hours of wireless playtime in a sweatproof design that's optimized for your workout. All the controls you need are on the knitted, tangle-free cord, passive transparency lets you hear your surroundings, and lightweight design ensures frictionless movement from warm-up to recovery. Sport is constant. So are you.

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SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

Lifestyle essentials

Matt Aminoff London

Established in 1972, Matt Aminoff London began as one of the first recognised importers of cultured pearls from China, Japan, Australia, Tahiti and Indonesia. Since then, the brand has evolved into a leading supplier of exceptional pearl and diamond jewellery. Many lines by Matt Aminoff London have become recognised as iconic designs in the international luxury jewellery market, such as their baroque South Sea pearl and diamond pendants and their Akoya pearl and diamond chain necklaces and bracelets. Today, the company channels their production exclusively through a select number of retailers throughout Europe. Contact us for a list of your local Matt Aminoff stockists or speak to your local jeweller to view the exclusive collection.

Web: www.mattaminoff.com
Instagram: @mattaminofflondon

Billy Ruffian Raglan loafer

Make the most of the last rays of summer and venture out in a pair of Billy Ruffian suede loafers. Handcrafted with a penny saddle, leather linings and sole, shown here in Snuff suede. Available in a variety of colours and finishes from £150.

View the full range online at billyruffianshoes.co.uk
+44 808 164 6224

Lifestyle essentials

Mandem Clothing present their GentleMandem winter collection

The North London-based brand ventures into smart wear and show how you can still look 'regal and road' in their wool coats with the brand's logo printed on the side panel.
The well fitted coats come in tan, burgundy and forest green.

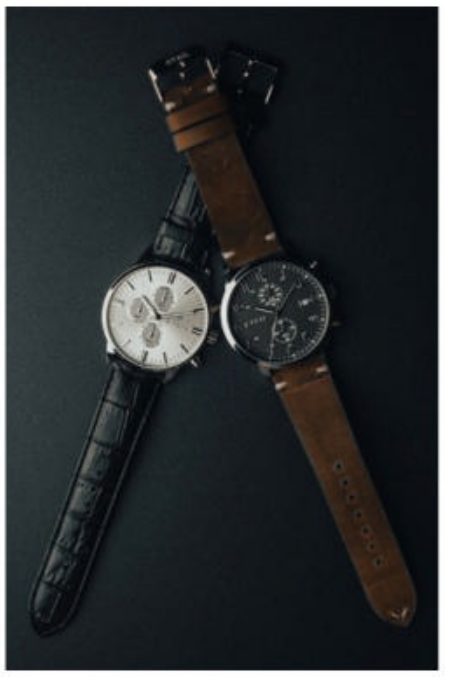
Available via mandem-clothing.co.uk instore at FMM Collective, Croydon Centrale Mall.

Avail Watches

AVAIL combines outstanding design, premium materials and quality craftmanship to create statement watches for men and all without typical industry mark-ups. Since launch in 2020, AVAIL has grown from strength to strength. As well as securing listings in multiple retailers, it has attracted a significant social media following, rated 5* Excellent on Trustpilot and even spotted on the wrists of some well-known celebrities.

Receive 15% off across the store with code 'ESQUIRE' (expires 30/04/22)
Shop: www.availwatches.co.uk
IG: @availwatches

Shot: Jay Cole @criticalcreations



Fold Roll Backpack by Utility Archive

This roll-top typifies Utility Archive's modern, sustainable design language, where function, ergonomics, protection and organisation combine in the perfect all-round daypack.
Efficiently constructed from only three body panels, the minimal exterior of this roll-top backpack conceals a comprehensive feature list: waterproof fabric, raw aluminium hardware, padded laptop sleeve, three concealed exterior pockets and a reflective logo.

utilityarchive.com
@utilityarchive

Lifestyle essentials

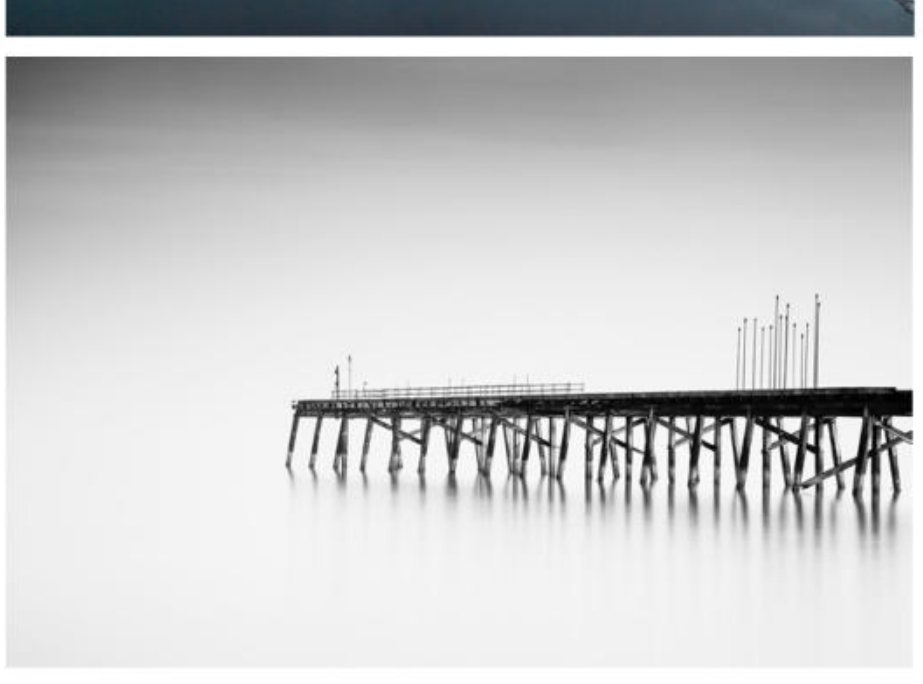
Misremembered landscapes

Matt Jukes' large-scale, one-of-a-kind monotypes on paper are misremembered landscapes and nearly forgotten memories. Each work explores colour and texture as the layers build over and over again, producing a discussion within the piece. Slowly, a memory of an emotion and a place will emerge, creating a space for dialogue with the viewer to explore their own emotions. His work can be found in rooms of the British institution, Claridge's and across private collections — from Sri Lanka to Australia.

mattjukes.ink
@mattjukes

Sandra Jordan

Visual meditations for the home and office



sandrajordanphotography.co.uk

Lifestyle essentials

Haskell Sand

Equally at home in the desert or on the underground, the Haskell Sand is a master of versatility and performance. The textured sandpaper dial colourway flits from glimmering golden desert to matte sandstone to white-sand beach, depending on how the light catches it.

The Sand is the only Haskell to feature black polished applied marking, numerals and hands, giving the dial a distinguished and contemporary edge. The contrast between light and dark is stunning and provides exceptional readability to the wearer. All hands feature identical counter-weights, for that one moment each hour when they all line up perfectly – a small detail within a dial full of them.

We have specified the dependable Swiss Made Sellita SW-215-1 manual winding mechanical movement for the Haskell. It's a petite movement at 25.6mm in diameter, a mere sliver at 3.35mm thick and when fully wound will run for over 40 hours.

We set out with the goal to create a modern day adventurer's watch; something that could be worn everywhere. A watch that is robust enough to withstand the daily rigours of the modern traveller and elegant enough for the urban adventurer. The Haskell has everything it needs to accompany you every step of the way; as you bustle through the daily commute or trek over the next peak.

marloewatchcompany.com
It's ready to serve.
Instagram: @mattaminofflondon

Backstage

Excerpts and out-takes from the pages of Esquire

Above: Cillian Murphy wears pink cotton-corduroy blazer, £695, by Drake's. Vintage mesh shirt, £50, by Nine Crows Vintage. White cotton T-shirt, £75, by Sunspel

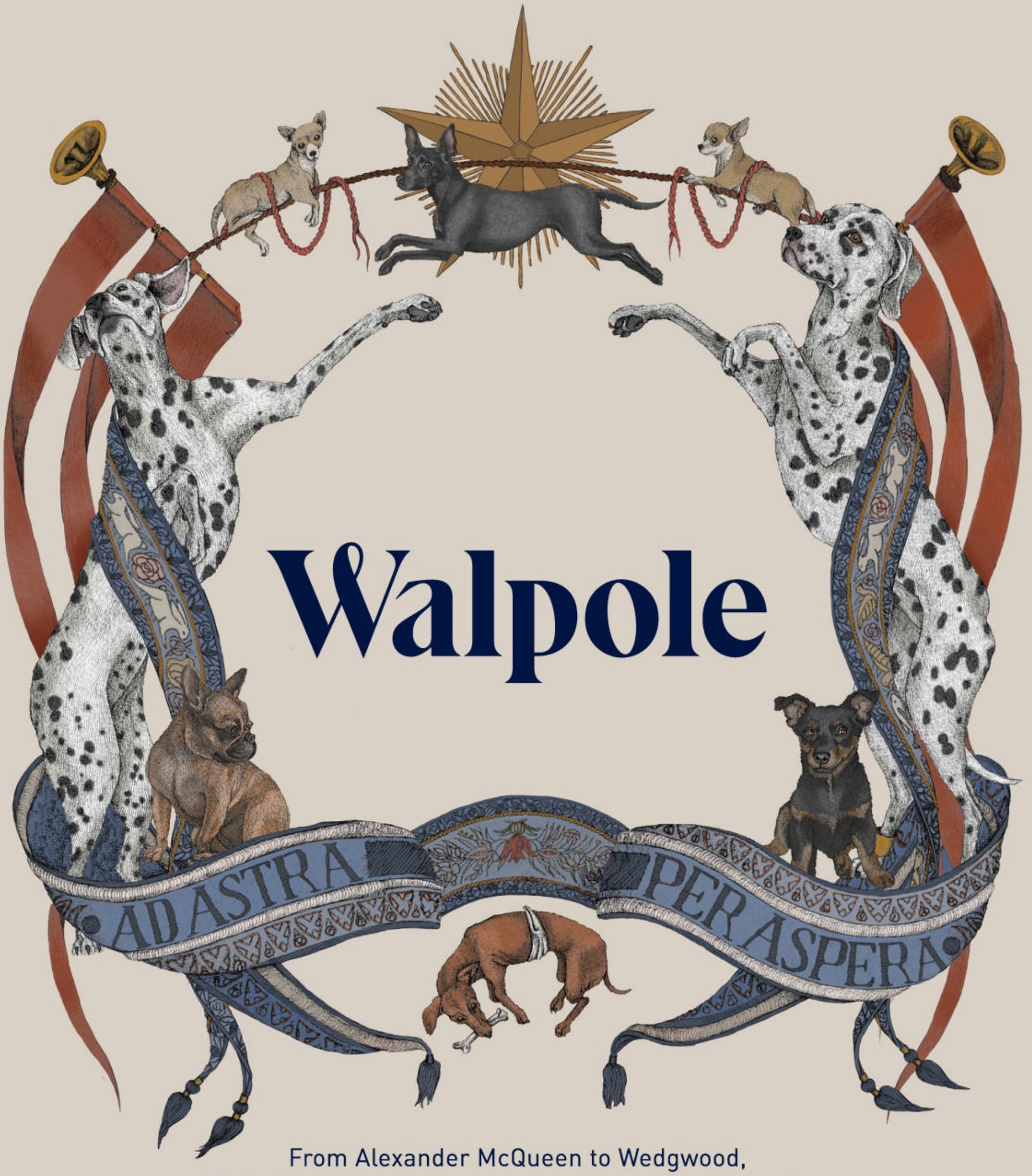
One of the abiding eccentricities of glossy print magazines is that we put together our spring and summer issues in the midst of autumn and the dead of winter, and vice versa. It means we find ourselves shooting swimwear as the snow falls and shearling when the sun shines. It's often surreal and occasionally headache-inducing, but we beat on...

Our cover shoot with Cillian Murphy, for this issue, took place in mid-October, in a leafy suburb of Dublin, the city the actor calls home. We had an excellent location: a charmingly tumbledown stately home to the west of the city. And, clearly, a surpassingly stylish leading man. The trick would be making all the newest warm-weather clothes look good in brisk mid-autumn.

Tom Craig, who took the pictures, is a master of natural-light photography, but even he can't make the sun shine. Over Guinness the night before the shoot, we prayed to the meteorological gods and, thankfully, they answered. Murphy arrived on set at around 10am the next morning and, by the time we'd got him into the first look, a crystalline sun was bathing the modest ballroom in light. It stayed, on and off, for the rest of the day and was at its most beguiling at around 5pm, allowing us to capture what we all quickly realised would be the cover image.

The above picture was taken as we prepped for the final shot, taken as the sun was dipping beneath the treeline. Murphy's shirt, on loan from Nine Crows Vintage in Dublin city centre, had just set free one of its aged buttons and, as the shoot's stylist, I was desperately trying to reattach the one measly shard I found on the floor. Tom's assistant Maya can be seen taking a hurried light measurement, while Tom tried to eke out one last picture. I think we got it, but I'm sad to report the remains of that button were lost to the wind. ○

Words by Charlie Teasdale | Tom Craig



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LOUIS VUITTON